Brotherhood of

the Snake

Brotherhood of the Snake

copyright

Philip Gardiner 2007

www.gardinersworld.com

Published by

Real2Can Books

www.Real2Can.com

All rights reserved under the Pan-American and International Copyright Conventions. This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, in any form or by any means electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system now known or hereafter invented, without written permission from Philip Gardiner.

Introduction

I felt the need to write an introduction to this work of fiction because quite simply, I am not known for writing fiction.

Instead I am better known for writing books on ancient mysteries, history, the occult and of course the worship of the serpent. It will therefore come as a surprise to those readers of my previous books that I have entered into the world of fiction in this way and even at all.

The truth is that there are often a great many things that one wishes to say in a factual book and yet are restricted from doing so. One publisher, whom I shall not name, actually forced me to remove whole sections from a book because it pointed blatantly towards the Catholic Church as aggressors,

manipulators and downright liars in our history. This fact is not unknown to the Church itself who have often admitted that they have "in the past" been at odds with various parties throughout the world. They set up inquisitions and slaughtered tens of thousands of perfectly peaceful people; they aided and abetted nation states in the invasion of free countries and stole the land and riches from beneath their feet; they instigated wave after wave of Holy Crusade into the Holy Land and today we still have a war-torn land. The blood of millions is upon the hands of this rich, powerful and supposedly Holy Church. That said, I personally know plenty of Catholics who are members of the Church today because of their own inner spiritual quest and upbringing and much of the Churches past is that, past. But the issue I had was that this factual historical truth was taken out of a book through fear and to me there should be no fear of truth.

The truth is, that mankind's history is not all about a strangeparation for the coming Messiah in Jesus Christ. This is a peculiar outcome of St. Paul's influence on the early Christian writings and his allegiance to Rome. In fact, all the evidence of this particular period points towards Jesus being a pretty normal Rabbi, if he existed at all in anyway we would recognize today.

The history of the world is a massive subject and the religious history only part of it. It is this part that I have focussed upon in my books and what I have always seemed to find is that the standard text books never really tell the whole truth. All we have to do is dig a little deeper and we discover that there is more beneath the surface. The true religious history of mankind will be found in perfectly ordinary things and related entirely to survival, the evolutionary instinct and the struggle with consciousness. You see, ever since man began to think for himself and of himself he discovered that his consciousness caused issues of right and wrong, black and white. Over the course of thousands of years he grappled with this concept and his place in nature and developed language, symbols, structures, texts, art, music and religion to come to terms with it. In each stage of man's progression the peculiar mystics would emerge who claimed access to the Divine (what some today may term the unconscious in touch with the Godhead). These mystics themselves were very often caricatured forms of the ultimate duality being starkly good and bad and yet powerfully aligned. The rest of

man listened to the intuitive sparks of light that seemed to erupt from this hotbed, wrote down the words and utterances and eventually did something very odd with them they literalised them. By this I mean that man took the words and metaphors literally and in time we really do end up believing that a man walked on water.

Now, in the twenty-first century we have new Gods in the form of celebrities and stars, whether they be film stars or sports stars, they are held up as our new "shining ones." This, to me is far worse than in times gone by, for we are worshipping flawed, divided and often, foolish humans. No longer do we at least have the moral guidance of a dogma and doctrine, of a Law or Commandments. Instead we have replaced them with an alpha dominant doctrine of dog eat dog; we have made idols of dragon chasing confused individuals who are themselves being manipulated and used by the power brokers who sit behind the scenes andittingly form a new world. These executive producers and boards of

directors are forcing us all down a road where the few have and the many do not and yet all the time they build the desire and inner turmoil in a Western capitalist society that simply must have a world of unseen starving masses to fund the show.

When will the world learn? Who knows, but the fact is that there has been a truth discovered by mankind and the producers and directors in robes who walk the corridors of Churches and Cathedrals has called it heretical. The truth was known for millennia and kept sacred by countless cults, secret societies and individuals. It emerged in time through the seeming nonsensical symbolism of alchemy, hidden and occult, from the unseeing eyes of the literalists. That truth was simple and yet profound in depths that take a lifetime to work through. Gnosis the knowledge of the Divine in the self; the working through balance in every part of our lives and the discovery of the greatest secret known to man the true Self.

The discovery of the Self is the greatest treasure hunt we can enter and it is the real core truth of all our fables and tales of journeys and quests. Those who wish to have power over us do not wish us to discover who we are, because it is the most empowering process an "individual" can do. The discovery that we are individuals will not feed the mouth of the gaping jaw

of capitalist greed nor religious intolerance. Instead it gives us what we should have been allowed all along, and in fact had if only we knew it freedom and will to do what we wish. The individual who thinks for himself is like a rogue particle refusing to be categorized by the quantum physicist.

Our ancestors had many thousands of years to think this process through and told us in many ways how to access this freedom, we just lost the will and knowledge to see it.

Discovery of self, love and compassion in balance, these are true words, not buy now pay later or confess thy sins and say ten Hail Mary's.

This book is a tale that may be taken literally or esoterically.

You may see only the story of a man and his exploits or you may see the journey of the soul, but whichever way you take it, I hope you enjoy it.

At the end of the book I have included a Timeline for those who wish to look a little deeper into the history, which underlies this novel. Further reading on the subject may also be found in my books and DVD's *Secrets of the Serpent, Gnosis: The Secret of Solomon's Temple Revealed, Gardiner's Forbidden Knowledge: Secret Societies, The Serpent Grail* and *The Ark, The Shroud and Mary.*

Prologue

It was early morning and the sun was peeking ever so slowly over the tree-lined horizon and bringing the first vestiges of warmth back into the cool air. In just a few thousands years this beautiful island in the Mediterranean would have no trees left, as man in his drive to build would reduce the landscape to bare rock and rubble. But for now the trees swayed gently in the breeze and the birds on their way to Europe from Africa danced against the prehistoric skyline. Occasionally a predator would swoop down to the ground and take up a scurrying lizard for breakfast and a murmur would emerge from the woods as it gracefully and effortlessly flew out of site. Then all would fall silent again, leaving the faintest sound of insects in its midst.

The sun, even at its height would fail to penetrate the depth of the forest, but at this time of day it sent shivers of gold through the higher branches. Every now and then the golden threads were broken as something nudged the trees from within the dark places.

They had been here for millennia, living in peace and harmony with their surroundings. Taking only what they knew would soon return and returning care and attention where needed. They had no desire to destroy, overpopulate or dominate. They simply wanted to live in peace. Where they had come from, most had long forgotten, but they knew that this place was better. Their folk tales spoke of a violent past, of wars and famine. Their nightmares told them that they had escaped some distant land, evading a great hate. All they cared for now was to realise their hopes and dreams of living harmoniously with one another and their environment, in balance.

They were led by one known as Abraxus, a strong and patient individual, who metered out wise words and goodness.

Nobody could argue with Abraxus, for he always knew what was best. It seemed to many in the community that he had

always been there. Even the older ones remembered him from their childhood and tales of his immortality were strong amongst the ordinary minded. But recently he had appeared to be failing in his magical ability to fend off the ravages of time. His green eyes were growing pale and clouded. He ate less and less and would sleep more. There were rumours that soon he was to choose a successor and move on to the other realm. And yet in private he complained of nothing and spoke little that would give his position away. And so the community went on, as it had for longer than anyone cared to mention or even knew except Abraxus. He knew, for he had been one of the originals. He had come as a child with the first settlers and established this place as home. Then as new children came along the originators split and wandered the world to find new homes. Eventually his parents died and he was left as the eldest, with the knowledge of his ancestors.

They had come to a remarkable group decision to forget the past and live for now. And this was how the history of this secretive race was lost; this

was how they lived in harmony, because they knew no hate nor malice and resented nothing.

Instead they had all they could eat and drink and never had to farm or trade. They were taught lessons of being one with the world around them from birth and they respected the power and beauty of nature.

But Abraxus knew things would change. He knew that a life so humble and perfect simply could not last forever. In the dead of night every year as the mid-summer sun settled down to sleep, elders from the scattered remnant of a lost race would converge in the islands of the north. The journey would take them a matter of days from wherever they resided, for within their many secrets they held the power of navigation.

To the others in the group this was called the time of rest.

Great and wonderful celebrations would be had by all and the woods would be alive with joy. They would hum beautiful tunes and the young ones would dance around sacred ancient trees, singing in harmony to the great mother. But as the separated groups around the world all sang of love and peace, the elders gathered in a solemn mood this last time. A new life

had emerged, a new consciousness and it was a divided mind that the elders were picking up. You see, this ancient race were in-tune with the vibrations of the very universe itself, just as a bird can sense the magnetism of the earth. They could sense the moods and changes of nature and they could sense imbalance. They knew that this was the greatest threat their race had faced since they had escaped their original home.

But they also knew they had time to prepare. And yet what they would do to prepare was now simply beyond them. Any concept of fighting was out of the question. Nor would they try to stop this new emergence of life. And so they simply did nothing and watched the progress. But Abraxus did do something alone that nobody would ever know.

Thousands and thousands of years passed by. Abraxus was now long since gone and his memory a distant and mythical one. The final group of the forgotten race on the small island in the sun-trapped Mediterranean were

only occasionally seen emerging from the waters or disappearing into the caves.

The new violent life-form that their ancestors warned them about had taken possession of the earth and destroyed their natural habitats. They built great structures and ripped the earth apart to take out rock and metal. They sent species after species into the dark hole of extinction and now they hunted the children of Abraxus.

An old, fat, pale skinned man dressed in colourful robes stood on the edge of the northern shores of the small island with a great staff in hand. He ordered his men this way and that.

Soldiers bearing the cross and wielding large swords dispersed along the embankment, cutting off any escape for the remnant. They could see them as dark shadows beneath the blue sea and they knew that it would be a matter of time before they had to surface. A dozen or so soldiers ran down to the shore and started to throw spears and stones; their fear of this ancient race showing on their faces. Fear, it seems, bred hatred and now hundreds of years later the hatred had grown

to such an extent that secrecy and devil worshipping propaganda had taken hold. This ancient race were hated across the world and the Lords men would erase them from memory.

Suddenly a spear struck and a child of Abraxus raised his head above water and stared into the eyes of the one who delivered it. The soldier was transfixed, stuck to the spot like standing stone. He saw into the deep green eyes of the ancient race and he saw nothing but pity for himself. He fell to the ground and clutched his hands together, praying to his god for forgiveness. Before him the tall, elegant demon let out one final ancient hum of love and slowly sank beneath the waves.

Around him his brothers and sisters let out a cry that sent shivers down the spines of the shocked soldiers. The water seemed to bubble with their loss. But the man on the hill raised his staff and soon there were hundreds of heavily armed men thrashing around in the waves. Paul would have his way.

Further down the coast and later that night a bedraggled old man sat staring out to sea. He tossed stones in as he drank foul wine from his leather bottle. His eyesight wasn't so good these days, nor his hearing. He couldn't remember the last time he'd eaten, but he cared less. His wife had died some months before of a strange disease that made her skin boil and explode. He had sat and watched her die and in that instant he had both lost the will to live and aged decades. The only thing that kept him alive were his two children, Lazarus and Mary.

They were hardly old enough to know what had happened and it broke his heart every time they asked when their mother was coming home. Little Lazarus, only just able to walk, would go to his chair before the window and look at his father with wondering eyes. Mary was now old enough to help around the house and she assumed the womanly role as if by pure natural instinct, but she too would still lay a place for her mother at the meagre table. Every time he looked into her eyes he saw his wife and it was all he could do to fight back the

tears. And so he would settle them in bed and bring a bottle of consolation down to the waters edge as if one day she would walk from the sea like some resurrected Venus.

Tonight was no different. Here he was drowning his sorrows in the cheapest wine he could find and ill afford. He stared blankly out to sea as the pale blue turned to dark blue and then black. The stars opened their eyes and watched their reflections dance on the simmering liquid landscape. But tonight the sea would set before him a surprise. As he took another swig of wine he noticed out of the corner of his eye the gentle waves break apart as if Neptune himself were coming ashore.

Startled he dropped the bottle and stood quickly to his feet as a large dark character emerged from the deep, drooping a little as if hurt. It was too dark to see his features, but he was very large and stunk like a ships rat. The old man's mind ran raced wondering what on earth this apparition was. Could it be Lucifer? He crossed his chest. Could it be some monster from the sea? He crossed his chest. Then he realised, it must be a sailor, shipwrecked out to sea that, or he had simply drunk too much.

He decided on the shipwrecked sailor scenario and showing a kind of mercy few had shown to him, he ran down to help the poor man. Once there he placed his arm part way around the giant and struggled to help him up the shore and back to his humble home.

They moved slowly and silently, neither speaking a word. The old man assumed the giant to be exhausted or indeed foreign and so he simply got him into the little stone house and lit a fire of brushwood on the hearth.

Nobody knew the secrets of Lazarus and Mary. Nobody knew that they harboured a hunted vestige of a time gone by. They eventually buried their old father in the same plot as their

mother and silently nursed their friend back to health. What happened in those years nobody was ever told, but eventually their friend died and was placed in a special tomb, built by the brother and sister in honour of his love, warmth and peaceful nature. To them he had been a living god and now they had to go out into the world to live a normal life. Lazarus saw to it that his sister found a good husband a blacksmith in a nearby town and he, well, Lazarus took a ship and headed north to the land of Empire builders.

Chapter 1

OceanofPDF.com

The Dead Man

He held tight onto a scrap of white paper and the ink ran and smudged from the boiling sweat that dripped from his palm like blood from an open wound. The heat of the midday sun made him perspire from every pore of his body. His dark hair stuck like glue to his skin and his clothes clung in that familiar, irritating fashion. It was times like this that he wished he hadn't grown this stupid beard a remnant of sadder days. Through blurred vision he noted that he was alone in the streets, bar a few stupid Englishmen who were staggering around from one bar to another. The locals were wise enough to stay off the streets in this heat. Millennia of living with the heat had ingrained sense into their genes. But they weren't chasing a secret.

This was Valletta in the summer, and this year the Maltese sun had decided to punish the pale skinned a little more than normal. Short sleeved, sweating tourists stumbled around like drunken fools, desperate to see everything and buy cheap gifts before their long awaited, and credit paid holiday ended.

Malta had been a second home to the British for decades.

Close connections derived from some minor shared history and the end of the age of British Empire building. The fact that Malta had been allowed to be overrun with Nazi's in the Second World War had soon been forgotten as the saviours in green arrived and freed the inhabitants. Now Malta was home to thousands of ex-pats who longed for Mediterranean sun and a more peaceful atmosphere. It was also one of the safe places that the British could come to. Safe in the respect that it understood them; it served the unique English breakfast of eggs, bacon, sausage, beans, tomatoes, fried bread and sometimes even black pudding the dried congealed blood of pigs. It served English beer morning, noon and night by the barrel load and it cleaned up the mess afterwards. It was the perfect British holiday fatty food, alcohol and a beach to overcome the hangover. In fact there were two sides to Malta.

The typical British holidaymaker tended to spend their days and nights around Bugibba and St. Paul's Bay in the north, venturing south rarely on day trips. Gozo, a small island to the north was generally for the rich who wanted a more peaceful time and apart from Mdina or Valletta in the south there was precious little else that attracted the standard drunken white man. Only those with serious interest in ancient history ever ventured out to see the amazing temples that scattered the island such as those at Tarxien.

The capital was a cosmopolitan mixture of European influences; one minute reminding John of Paris, the next of Florence and then of Greece, Rome and even sometimes Germany and Spain. He had seen enough of the world and was knowledgeable in architectural intricacies and so he could spot the various traits of each nation stamped on the buildings like a calling card. It was indeed a fascinating trip down a historical lane and the whole island held a deep rooted interest for John. Last time he had been here was with his late wife. He had been holding her hand at this very location and the thought of that wonderful experience just served to bring on his recurrent sadness. He had spent months in solitude, drinking, burning pictures and then regretting it and of course allowing his facial hair to model him into the more sorrowful looking character that he was clearly on the inside. He banished the thought once more from his troubled mind and staggered onwards.

He was heading for the National Museum of Archaeology situated in the Auberge de Provence on Republic Street. It was a beautiful location that Hollywood would never be able to recreate. The buildings were old and weather worn. The shop fronts held behind them tales of a secret past and if one raised ones eye level just a little one would see the ornate stone carvings and peeling paint of the verandas and shutter boards.

The museum in contrast was a medieval building, but this time severely modernised and contained some of the finest and most priceless artefacts from the prehistoric temples of Malta and Canadian born and British taught John Baptiste

was on his way to view some quite specific items.

John was a loner. He shared very little of his research with others and spent many hours alone in his college room studying fusty old books and crumbling manuscripts.

Occasionally he would let his mind wander off into some crazy conspiracy theory or alternative and so-called world of forbidden knowledge on the internet and fall asleep watching videos of aliens being chopped up on some unknown laboratory table. He always assumed this alternate ego was the part of himself that sought out truth and he never really took any of it seriously.

He was in fact quite normal and boring to the outside world.

As visiting professor of anthropology at St. Lilith's College, Oxford, where he had held the position for just two years, following the sudden death of his wife Catherine, he was expected to keep a low profile on his own private x-files. But why did he leave Canada? Well he simply could not stay in the house, the street or even the town, where so many memories crippled his thoughts and drove him to such excruciating pain. Every tree, park, shop and even the people brought back the memories of his wife and the pain was agonising. And so he applied for work overseas and the peers and elders of his Toronto University found him work in Oxford, England, far away from the scar tissue that had been his previous life. John passed the tests, achieved the desired results and the secret handshakes of the college deans sealed his future. Little did he know that his future would hold dark secrets and high danger; little did he know that his future was already being planned.

Now in the heat of the Mediterranean sun John was on a mission that first involved seeing some peculiar artefacts.

Finally John arrived at the large glass doors of the Museum of Archaeology only to find that it closed at lunch. This trap always caught John out. Every time he came to this part of the world he forgot that the shops were not open twenty four hours; that there were no great big malls and that the people

couldn't care less how much money you flashed in front of them it was too damn hot you stupid foreigner.

And so, following a short, sharp curse beneath his breath he decided to surrender and turned to find a café where he could relax and have a coke.

Taking a well-earned seat in a smoky hole opposite the museum where he could spot the doors opening again, he ordered his coke, lit a cigarette and the memory of his wife's outrage at his smoking habit haunted him like a spectre. He carried on to smoke regardless, wiped his brow and opened the scrap of paper he had clutched with religious fervour. He read it for the thousandth time.

"Dear Prof. Baptiste

We are please to acknowledge your interest in our skulls and the letter of commendation from Professor Schonfield and can therefore confirm that we shall make arrangements for the artefacts to be taken from the security vaults upon your arrival around the dates you suggest.

Please accept this letter as confirmation and should I be absent when you arrive, then please show it to my deputies who will be only too pleased to assist you in your research. I shall copy them in on this letter for your convenience.

Yours truly,

Mattia Presti

Curate and Manager of the Museum of Archaeology, Auberge de Provence,

Republic Street,

Valletta,

Malta"

It was a simple answer to a simple question and John had been overjoyed to be allowed to follow up on his new lead. In fact, it was his only lead and the letter, following a wait of two

months had been sorely awaited. John's new role at St Lilith's was to follow the work of Victorian researchers in their search for the ancient Ophites the worshippers of serpents. The fact of the matter was that John had never heard of them in all his years of anthropological study and so this new avenue had re-inspired him.

What he found was quite amazing and a real eye opener. He began with the Victorian tales of serpent worshippers, from Hargrave Jennings study of *Ophiolatreia* to Clarke and Staniland's work in their published *Serpent and Siva Worship*.

He discovered that the widespread worship of the serpent had been known of, but it was as if it had been covered up by the Christian fundamentalist craze of the Victorian age. This excited John's inner desire to uncover a conspiracy of his own and so, true to his new found form, decided to follow up each and every lead he could and to trace the cults both backwards in time and indeed forwards. He was no ardent conspiracy theorist, but he had to wonder what had become of these ancient and powerful groups.

And so, after just two years in the job, he found himself in Malta, on a trip fully paid for by his new employers, chasing a final lead. This time he knew the evidence he sought was real and physical. He had plenty of proof of the widespread nature of the cults on paper and in a few artefacts, but he had no actual serpent worshipper himself in the bag. If the skulls here in Malta proved to be what he believed them to be, then he would have a story to put St Lilith's on the map and re-inspire the sponsors to allow him to continue his research. He knew he had only a matter of months left before his money ran out and he was re-assigned, which simply meant lecturing dull history to dull students. He also needed to prove to himself that he was still alive and that his soul had not yet died and joined his wife on the other side.

Following three more cokes and six cigarettes in a seeming attempt to bring on an early death, the time was up.

Lunchtime was over and he could see across the now steadily

busy streets that the museum had opened its doors once more.

He stood, took up his black carryall and tipped the waiter. As he hit the street again the heat hit him back like a football player on speed. He hurried himself over to the glass doors and almost burst through them, making the guard inside turn swiftly.

There was a welcoming cool breeze from an industrial sized air conditioner and John breathed a sigh of relief. He stopped, put down his bag, wiped his sweating brow and looked around. The lightly furnished stone room was empty of humans but for the uniformed guard who had by now returned his gaze to the newspaper in his hands, happily oblivious again to the world around him. John picked up his bag and walked towards the guard who did his absolute Maltese best to ignore him.

"I have come to see Mattia Presti", announced John as he held out the piece of paper towards the man in blue, who in response calmly glanced over his newspaper and nodded in the general direction of the grand white marbled staircase to the left. "I presume that means go up the stairs then," John mumbled to himself and took the advice.

And so John headed for the stairs, noticing out of the corner of his eye that the guard had now stood, folded his newspaper and was walking away from his desk. Halfway up the stone marble ascent John casually looked down into the foyer and the guard had disappeared, the glass door coming gently to a close. "Strange place." He thought to himself.

The stairs led to a scruffy looking second level of offices, which appeared quite simply, abandoned. There were overturned waste baskets and deathly silence.

"Is there anybody there?" shouted John to nobody but himself. He looked around the small landing at the top of the stairs and through the long window to the now bustling shopping street below. He noticed the same guard now

walking down the street to a waiting green car, taking off his jacket and rolling it up, placing it under his arm as he got into the passenger seat. "Curious." He turned back to the corridor of offices now and called again. "Is there anybody there?" He smiled at himself; it sounded like he was

asking the spirit world to emerge. There was no reply from the alive or the dead.

So, he walked down the long white corridor, littered with boxes of paper and printer cables. The doors were marked with names and titles and so John presumed he would soon find Mattia Presti's office. As is always the case with these things, it was the last office.

He knocked. Nothing. He knocked again. Still nothing. So he tried the handle. It clicked and the door fell open before him, creaking as if he were in some kind of cheesy horror film. A stench that he could not even begin to describe invaded his senses and he almost keeled over. "What the hell is that?" he thought to himself. He walked forward, taking tentative steps.

"Mr Presti?" he said firmly, as if to bolster his own sense of fear.

There never would be another reply from Mattia Presti and his family would mourn his death for years to come. His wife would wear the solemn black for the rest of her life and his two young children would never know their father.

Mattia Presti was lying on his own office floor, behind his own desk that he had been so proud of. The pictures of his family smashed upon the floor, mingling with a pool of warm blood. Around his throat was a cord and tied to the cord was a note.

John slowly edged forward, knelt down and in pure sick curiosity twisted the note in-order to read it.

"Mattia Presti. Dead. Take notes Mr Baptiste. Brotherhood of

the Snake."

The world suddenly went dark, then black, and all John remembered was feeling very strange and falling backwards uncontrollably.

Chapter 2

OceanofPDF.com

Lies

There was a thumping pain in his head and for some reason his wrists hurt. He opened his eyes slowly and saw nothing but bright light. The blazing white fuzzy world around him gradually began to take form and the pain in his head increased. Then it all went black again.

The next thing he remembered was the sound of cars jostling for position, raising hell with horns and people talking, lots of people. There was the noise of a slight breeze, or was that the sea? He couldn't tell. This time he knew he was lying on his side and it felt like he was undressed but covered by a blanket.

Again, he ventured to open his eyes and this time the reduced pain in his head allowed him to see more clearly. Although still hazy, the images around him seemed to make sense. It was a hospital of some kind and the noise of the streets came flooding in through the open window. There was the noise of sea gulls and now a definite sound of waves. He manoeuvred himself upright with difficulty because for some reason his hands were firmly clasped in hand cuffs.

"Oh no, they think I killed him" he thought to himself, not realising the full extent of his predicament, "stupid Maltese idiots."

The room was small, stunk of urine and everything was painted white. There were bars on the windows and the door looked like something from a bank vault. "Not only do they think I killed him, they think I'm mad", he muttered to himself as he tried to swivel out of bed. For some reason he couldn't move his legs.

Using his knees and wriggling like a snake he managed to uncover himself and found that his ankles were strapped in leather and chained to the bottom of the bed. This was the final straw and he let out a yell that would have made the Yeti

proud. Suddenly in the distance he heard an alarm sound and chairs scrape across stone floors.

Within seconds there was a rustling sound at the vault door and in burst three burly looking male nurses, dressed from head to toe in white, with no belts or buckles in sight.

"You be quiet you murdering bastardo", said the central and more authoritative character as he headed straight for John like a man on a mission. It seemed that the Maltese didn't take too kindly to having one of their own murdered. It was in fact a small island, just slightly larger than its neighbour Gozo, at only seventeen miles wide. John remembered the place fondly for the times he had spent with his wife and the friends they had made with the local fishermen in Sliema. His wife had loved animals and one morning they had been walking along the sea front before all the other tourists and spotted the fishermen feeding the stray cats. It wasn't long before John and his wife had been buying drinks at a local bar for the men and their extended families and even being invited back to their homes to partake of real Maltese food and hospitality.

Now it seemed John was being entertained in a much different way.

The burly nurses quickly worked out that John wasn't going into a fit of rage or any other kind of fit and soon there was only one nurse remaining.

"What do you want madman?" he said in almost perfect English.

"I want to know why I am tied up and in here. I didn't kill Mattia Presti or anybody else", he replied indignantly.

"That's for the police to decide not me. I'll call them and tell them you have decided to wake up. Be calm now, you have a bump on your head." And with that he turned, slammed the door shut and locked it with as much hate as he could muster.

It seemed like hours slowly ambled by. With no distraction and no entertainment the noise of the street outside grew louder and louder and John thought to himself that the noise alone was enough to send anybody

mad. Last time he'd been this bored was at his brothers wedding, waiting around for the whole thing to be over.

It had been a beautiful day and the sun had shone in glorious Technicolor. His brother had fallen in love with a young Englishwoman of no great descent, but even so, the wedding had been planned for a stately home in Derbyshire. The setting was perfect. The grey stone of the hall was beautifully offset by the red ivy that circumnavigated the windows and doors. The bride looked like a princess and dozens of people wandered about aimlessly wondering what to do and where to stand. The only problem was that John was anti-social and hated public speaking and at this event he had to be best man.

Following several large brandies for Dutch courage John finally stammered out his speech and settled down for the long arduous task of seeing the festivities through. After a couple of hours he had developed a thunderous headache and made his excuses. Within minutes he was upstairs in one of the stark modern guestrooms with his wife and the pain in his head subsided. They had both stripped and made love for over an hour before falling into a deep sleep. The next morning they woke, endured the wedding breakfast and drove back to the airport. That was the last time he had seen his wife alive.

They had both flown to different parts of the world. John making back for New York and his wife for Ghana where she was to help set up a new animal charity. On arrival she had been picked up by a local taxi driver and all the police could say was that somewhere between the airport and her destination the taxi had been hijacked and his wife multiple raped and murdered. The culprits had never been found.

Maybe the whole experience had driven him mad. Maybe he had killed Mattia Presti in some kind of unconscious rage. No, he would never do that, would he?

John's experience of the unconscious world from that time onward had been a strange one. Almost every night he suffered intense and painful nightmares. He was in the pit of human depravity, living alongside

murderers, thieves and rapists. He stood by as those around him skewered children, decapitated grown men and sexually abused the women.

Every sleeping moment was a hell he could not escape. Never once was there glimmer of hope. Never once did he speak up and put a stop to the terrible baseness. It seemed he was living his wife's torture again and again and simply could not overcome the intense misery of life without her. The cycles of his life were seemingly in a desperate downward path. For some reason he blamed himself for the horrible death she had succumbed to. If only he had gone with her. She had pleaded with him to take a few weeks off from work, but he had insisted that his career depended on him getting back as soon as possible. She would be ok; Ghana was a safe country now.

If only he had thought it through. It was his fault and now he was getting his reward, his karma was crucifying him both in sleep and now in the waking state. Even the good times were slowly evaporating and being replaced with visions of hell.

His only lifeline into sanity was his focus on the serpent past and now it seemed even this was slipping from his grasp.

His thoughts were broken as he heard feint voices of officialdom outside the heavy door. He tried to breathe calmly, so as not to give the impression of an insane killer. He wriggled to try and sit upright, but the restraints on his ankles prevented him from getting into a comfortable position. His heart began to pound and beat out a rhythm like drums in the darkest jungle. Sweat broke out on his brow and he couldn't wipe it off. It trickled down over his nose and dripped tortuously like some kind of cruel torment from an invisible inquisitor. Finally the door opened and in walked two short, stocky Maltese policemen dressed in black suits and white shirts.

"Mr Baptiste?" said the one on the right who sported black stubble and a loosely fitting black tie.

"Yes" came John's weak reply. He needed a drink; the fear and stress had made him remarkably dry.

"Good" came the short reply, "get us some chairs Nicholas", he shouted to the nurse who had let them in.

Both policemen stood in silence awaiting the chairs, looking intently at John's face, like members of the Gestapo. The second policeman looked somewhat younger than the first, with the same dark, greasy, curly hair but clean-shaven and a well-done necktie. He held under his arm a sand-coloured file, wrapped in white cord.

The chairs arrived and placed either side the bed a psychological trick John had read about in his files on secret police.

"So Mr Baptiste, or may I call you John?" said the elder policeman.

"Yes, sure, whatever you want. I didn't kill him, I'm not mad, this is all a terrible mistake" babbled John incoherently.

"Yes, I'm sure it is, and my friend here is Jesus", he mocked.

"Now, we have some questions for you, and I'm sure, as an innocent man, you will have no trouble answering them?"

"No, not at all. Can I have a drink?"

"Nicholas", shouted the first policeman, "bring our guest a drink of water."

They waited, again in silence, the sweat pouring from John's brow and his fear rising like a demon from the flames.

Eventually the water arrived in a clear plastic cup and the nurse poured it slowly into John's parched mouth dousing the devil of fear. He gulped it down like a condemned man.

"There, now you have your drink. Why are you here in Malta Mr Baptiste?"

"I came to see Mattia Presti. The archaeological teams here had found some dolichocephalous skulls and…"

"What" the policeman interrupted, "is a what you call it skull?"

"Oh, sorry, yes, it's an elongated skull, like you see in images of the ancient Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaton. The skull extends backwards, kind of like an alien head. Its normally caused by a unique disease or by special moulding of the skull from birth with the hands or planks of wood", John replied, trying to make it as easy to understand as possible.

"Ok, please continue."

"Well, they had found these skulls on their new dig beneath the Grand Masters residence on Goo and didn't know what to make of them. But they also found some images of snakes and a snake goddess figurine, like the Minoan snake lady.

Anyway, it was widely known in the field that I was on the look out for these kinds of things and so a colleague at Oxford passed the word. I quickly got on the phone and was told that the skulls had been placed in storage at the Museum of Archaeology in Valletta and so I wrote to Mr Presti, requesting a viewing. I have, or had, the letter somewhere", John was convinced his tale sounded reasonable.

"We found no letter Mr Baptiste. You were found on the floor of Mattia Presti's office two days ago with nothing but a blow to the head. In Mr Presti's hand was a statue of the Virgin Mary, with your blood upon it. It seems from the evidence before us that you strangled Mr Presti and before he drew his final breath he hit you upon the head. Your fingerprints were all over his neck, desk, door and in many other places", the policeman seemed to take great pleasure in laying this incredible version before John.

"But what about the cord and the note?" asked John, stunned at the twist of events he was hearing.

"What cord and what note Mr Baptiste?" smiled the policeman, intrigued by the similar twist in John's tale.

John closed his eyes for a moment and tried to remember exactly what he had seen. The memory was blurred and now being confused with his own inner self desire to be found guilty and to suffer for the death of his wife. The images inside his head were merging with his own imagined images of

him strangling Presti and being lunged at by a dying man with a statue of Mary. How ironic, laid low by the Mother of God. He tried desperately to shake off the image and opened his eyes. He could see straight into the mind of the policeman and read his thought, ""he's going to confess, I know it."

"There was a dark cord around Mr Presti's neck, it looked like the means of death to me and blood was pouring from his mouth all over the floor. It was horrible. The stench was awful. On the cord was a note. I must have touched his neck when I read the note", John was thinking the logical process out loud.

"And what did this note say Mr Baptiste?" said the policeman as he tilted his head sideways, attempting to look interested.

His mind was already made up.

"It said, erm, let me get this right."

"Yes, please do, take your time. We have plenty of time together Mr Baptiste."

"No, I know it now, it said 'Mattia Presti. Dead. Take notes Mr Baptiste. Brotherhood of the Snake.'" As he said the words John became as confused as the policemen. He could see their apparent disbelief, it was written all over their faces. "Its true, honest, you have to believe me. Somebody is setting me up

here. I didn't kill Presti. What possible reason would I have?"

"Well Mr Baptiste, we shall of course go and check out your story, but you ask for motive and I shall give you a motive.

Three years ago Mattia Presti had been staying at the Golden Tulip hotel in Ghana close by the airport whilst on some minor archaeological digs under the auspices of the UN

Ancient History Department. He was single at the time and quite a lover boy according to his colleagues. It seems he had triumphantly bragged about a sexual liaison he had with an American woman who had stopped at the hotel. It seems Mr Baptiste that your wife had stayed at the hotel when she flew into Ghana, on the very same night that Mr Presti claimed to have made love with an American woman. We have checked the records and indeed your wife's credit card reveals that she did indeed stay at the hotel on the night in question and being a Canadian, it is easy to make the mistake of calling her American. There were no other Americans or Canadians at the hotel that night Mr Baptiste and the next thing we know is that your wife is found dead several miles away, having been raped and horribly murdered. In fact his wife has confirmed Mr Presti's previously amorous ways and also his sometimes violent sexual rage."

John sat and listened. It was just too incredible to be true. He felt sick to the stomach and started to feel light-headed. The silent policeman noticed him begin to sway and jumped to catch him before he hit his head on the bedstead.

The world had gone dark again and all the familiar noises of cars, sea gulls and people fell away into nothing. John was flying in a black soup, fearful of the unseen. Suddenly he was back in familiar territory. It was a garbled vision of an intensely hot African town wrenched from his own imagination. There was a mixture of mud huts and white gleaming palaces with roads of dusty earth and silent children chasing emaciated chickens. To his right was a saloon bar looking as if it came more from a Western movie than a town in Ghana. Outside were half-dressed old black men sat on

broken chairs, smoking long white pipes and talking in some peculiar unknown tongue. On his left there was a white dishevelled Toyota pickup with two black policemen standing on the back thumping their palms with large white sticks. In the air was a strange music, like a sorrowful woman singing a long forgotten lament. For some reason he was drawn towards an immense white palace at the end of the street. Its façade was made of marble and there were columns mocking ancient Greece and a garden that would have looked more at home in England than Africa. The sweet but sad

music seemed to be coming from this stark place and so John decided to head for it.

As he walked the policemen jumped from their pickup and followed, muttering to each other in their peculiar dialect and thumping their white sticks harder and harder. The old men on his right mocked and jeered, puffing great plumes of grey smoke into the air, creating a sickly sweat smell like blood.

John's heart began to beat faster and louder, in time with the thumping of the sticks. It grew so loud that he could even hear it above the jeers of the old men. He walked faster and faster, but the white palace seemed to get further and further away.

Suddenly a strange figure, with an alien styled elongated head and a rope around its neck ran from out of nowhere towards John's destination, leaving a trail of dust, blurring John's vision.

John tried to speed up, but the palace seemed to move away even faster. He knew that this man spelled danger to whatever it was making that otherworldly music, but he could do nothing to increase his speed. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't move any faster. He was trapped in the horror of his own mind.

Eventually the alien character disappeared behind the white wall of the garden and all John could do was keep walking, feeling the pressure of the policemen behind. Then he heard the most gut wrenching scream. A woman's scream. His wife's. The lament had stopped abruptly.

Tears ran from his eyes and his legs went weak. He had failed again. He had failed to save his beautiful wife. He fell to his knees in the dirt and suddenly he was in the garden, surrounded by roses and lilies. It seemed that the moment he stopped trying to run he succeeded in getting to his destination. The harder he pushed the further was from his goal and yet when he relaxed he found what he was looking for.

The dust of the road had gone. The noise of the jeering had diminished and the thumping of the policemen's sticks was now a feint echo. He heard birds

and the swaying of the willow trees. He felt at home; he felt calm and peaceful, but the sad singing now started again and grew in intensity and he knew that the source was directly behind him, in his past as well as his location. His heart stopped, his throat grew dry and a sense of foreboding invaded his mind. He had no wish to turn and see what he knew to be there, but he also knew he must. He had to face this punishment yet again.

Slowly he turned, scraping his knees on the sharp flint that was the base of this near perfect garden of dreams. The singing stopped and before him laid out like a pig on a butchers table was his naked wife. Her legs were so wide they almost split. Her hair torn out, her skin cut and bruised and her dead face sad. Her mouth gaped wide and her teeth were rotten. She was a corpse, a carcass that nobody cared for. He reached out for her one last time and pulled back in fear as a hissing noise emanated from the hollow of her mouth. Two green slits appeared in the black cavern and then a slithering tongue. A large black head of a snake emerged, staring straight at John and then it spoke.

"Take notes Mr Baptiste", it said in an ugly hissing fashion.

Chapter 3

OceanofPDF.com

The New Girl

"Why don't you send the new girl?" said Arthur Waite, the large, sweating and decidedly unhealthy assistant editor of the New York Herald. The new girl in question was a full-blooded American who had just come from some Portuguese newspaper where she had been training. Arthur had never worked out how to say the name of the specific location, but he did know that regardless of how glamorous this new dark eyed girl was, she was a pain in the butt. She had been thrust upon them from the powers above - namely the board. It was a normal process and for some reason nobody ever put up a fight. The board would suddenly decide to drop a new reporter or sub-editor on them and that was that. Everybody else had to either move posts or somehow accommodate the new member of staff. It was always a challenge to find something for them to do, but by coincidence within just a few days a nice far-off foreign job would come in and the new reporter would be sent. Often that was the last they heard of them. Nobody ever put two and two together.

"Yeah Waitee, what a great idea", an overworked and stressed editor replied. Frank Watt was a thin man with no hair. Years of smoking had stained his fingers, lips and teeth yellow and unbeknown to him almost destroyed his lungs. He lived for his job and had lost everything else in the process wife, children and even house. Now he lived alone in a Manhattan apartment near the Hotel Pennsylvania, overrun with rats and cockroaches. It simply didn't matter to Frank; he lived in the th

office or at the small Irish bar on 8 avenue. Occasionally he would sleep in the apartment, but only on holidays and only if the bar was closed. His hero was the infamous writer of the James Bond novels, Ian Fleming, and in his youth he had written hundreds of spy stories each one sent to the publishers and each one rejected. So he had decided to take up journalism and soon found himself carrying the post at the New York Times. He met a beautiful young girl there by the

name of Brenda Fieldman and quite frankly he should have known better. One thing led to another and they found themselves in a closet making love.

Three months later Brenda announced her condition to Frank and by this time he had also learnt that Brenda was in fact the daughter of the Political Editor. He had no choice but to marry Miss Fieldman and in so doing found himself on the ladder of one of the world's most prestigious newspapers. Now, thirty-five years later Brenda had remarried twice and lived the life of luxury in LA, while his two children had families of their own or so he was told. He hadn't seen them for over fifteen years. The thought, when allowed to surface always made him incredibly sad and often he would kill the pain with a Whisky and a cigarette.

"You know Frank, she looks a lot like Brenda when she was young", said Arthur knowing as he spoke the words that he should have kept his stupid mouth shut.

Frank stared at Arthur for what seemed an eternity, the hustle and bustle of the lunatic asylum they called an editorial office just a whisper in the background. Arthur was desperately trying to think of a way to backtrack, but his boss's eyes were mesmerising. Frank on the other hand was simply trying not to show any emotions, his guts ached at the sound of her name and the thought of the life he had thrown away. He didn't blame Arthur for making the comment, but he couldn't help the desire to knock him to the floor. Maybe he was right, maybe she did look like Brenda. In fact he was right and then a thought dawned upon him. A mad thought that he simply couldn't throw off. What if this was his second chance? He wasn't so ugly was he? He wasn't over the hill yet. Maybe this was his new Brenda?

"You know Waitee, I need a break too. I think I'll go with her.

Yep, its time for me to get back into the field. I've been stuck in this godforsaken office for fifteen years and I ain't seen the sunlight in all that time." Frank ignored the stunned and whitening face of his colleague who stood speechless like a

marble statue and picked up the phone. "Sandra, yeah, good, you? Now, get Nina up to my office pronto. Yeah, the new girl. Oh, and Sandra, get two tickets on the next flight to Malta. Yes Sandra, it's a real place."

Two days later a tall sultry looking female reporter going by the name of Nina Lamia and a thin bedraggled editor of the New York Herald were in JFK waiting for their flights to Heathrow airport, London. It seemed they couldn't get a flight direct to Malta airport and had to connect.

Nina was stood in a short black skirt and a tight white blouse putting on lipstick, while Frank feeling every part the Casanova tried to figure out where their boarding gate was.

He had crammed his entire wardrobe into one small cabin bag, half of which contained cigarettes and two bottles of the finest Scotch whisky. His colleague on the other hand had two suitcases and a large personal bag, as well as an awful lot of distaste for her new found friend.

"Gate eight sweetheart", said Frank as he stubbed his last cigarette out before the long flight to the UK. "Better get going."

"OK Frank", smiled Nina and she slowly put her lipstick away, fastened her handbag and walked off, leaving Frank behind to pull the two large suitcases to check-in.

They checked in with no trouble and Frank paid Nina's excess on her luggage while she stood talking to a passing pilot. They then made their way to gate eight and bought a coffee from the scruffy looking café nearby. Nina didn't touch hers and sat reading the latest Dan Brown novel. Frank returned from the toilet and settled down to read the New York Times and gulp his coffee. Within minutes Frank was dead.

The coroner later said, when drawing a verdict of death by heart attack, that Frank's over indulgence in smoking and drinking had been his downfall. In the end he had gone the

same way as his hero, but missed by nobody. While the medics pumped at his chest and blew into his lungs the tall, dark, sexy reporter from the New York Herald boarded the plane and made for London.

"You have a visitor Mr Baptiste", came the voice of the male nurse.

He'd been lying in this dirty bed for days, unable to get up and move about, tied to the horizontal prison like some kind of mass murderer. Two days ago he'd had another visit from his friendly Maltese policemen to inform him that they had checked out his story and that none of it made any sense.

There were no skulls that he had described; there was no letter, no cord, and no note. Nobody knew anything about any of it. John had argued and gave them the name of his colleague in Oxford who had passed on the word. They had already checked this and the gentleman in question had found himself sent on an archaeological dig in China. He was impossible to contact for at least three months. Until then, it seemed John Baptiste had no possible way of proving his story. It seemed he was doomed and so he had spent long hot sticky days lying on his side, then his back and then his side again to try and overcome the bedsores and the boredom.

Every night he had succumbed to the same horrible nightmare and every morning he had woken into this very real hell. His own logic was quickly escaping and with each passing moment he was more and more convinced that he was indeed mad and may have actually created his story to evade the truth himself. It was in fact more logical to him now that he had killed Mattia Presti and that the whole nonsense about the Brotherhood of the Snake was a fabrication of his tattered imagination. He seriously considered that his research into the ancient serpent worshippers had finally twisted his unconscious world into this macabre world he now occupied.

"Mr Baptiste!" Shouted the nurse. "Do you hear me?"

"What? Oh yes, yes, sorry." He finally emerged from the depths of his own mind and with bloodshot eyes looked towards the door. There, standing just behind the bored and impatient male nurse was an angelic vision of beauty. A tall perfectly formed dark eyed raven, dressed in an almost see-through cream linen dress with breasts that would make the mother goddess herself jealous. As she walked in the room John's eyes were fixated on the movement of these obviously free male-killers. He quickly snapped his mind out of its transfix and spoke:

"Sorry, are you my attorney?" His voice was gruff and his throat sore. He wasn't eating or drinking enough and his whole body ached.

"No Mr Baptiste, I am a reporter from the New York Herald.

Miss Lamia, pleased to meet you." Her voice sounded like his wife's sorrowful tome in his dreams, her eyes bewitching and her elf-like hand outstretched to shake his own.

"Err, sorry, Miss Lamia, my hands are bound." He held up as far as he could the two hands fastened like a mule.

She withdrew her hand and turned to look at the nurse who was engrossed in her behind. "Is this necessary?"

"Orders I am afraid Miss Lamia. I will go now and leave you two alone. Here is a chair." And with that he slammed the thick heavy door shut and locked it from the outside.

"I see you are doing well Mr Baptiste?" It was an obvious lie as she looked around the empty whitewashed room and took out a perfumed handkerchief to hold to her nose.

"I'm glad you think so. I have lost track of how long I have been in here and am losing the will to live." He replied, settling back down to answer more questions. "You are obviously here to let the folks back home what a mad Canadian has done to a poor Maltese man?"

"Something like that. Have you had a lawyer?" She asked, knowing that he had not, but wanting to judge for herself the reason why.

"No, I haven't even asked for one and I did have a visit from a local government paid attorney who said he'd represent me."

He had been so low that he hadn't even considered getting representation and cared less. They could crucify him for all he cared now.

"You know, you should. I can sort one out for you if you wish?

Anyway, we can talk about that later. First I want to hear your story on what happened." She took out a small digital voice recorder and placed it on the

bed. "You don't mind me recording this do you?" And with that she turned it on.

"Well, I don't know where to start, but I will try, yet again. I came to this goddamned island to see Mattia Presti of the Museum of Archaeology. Some local archaeologists had uncovered some dolichoceph…. Oh, elongated skulls that were a mystery to them. You see, skulls like this have never been found in this area and strangely they were found directly beneath the Grand Masters residence on Gozo.."

"Grand Master of what?" She interrupted.

"Grand Master of the Knights of St John," he replied forgetting that this beautiful woman may look smart, but knew nothing of such historical tales. "They were an order of Knights now known more commonly as the Knights of Malta.

They still exist to this day and have an office or commandery in the Vatican. They don't go around on horseback or wear full armour the whole time. These days the members are politicians, priests or even businessmen. But in the old days they battled for Christendom and were rewarded with great riches, including this island. It's a long story, but following being kicked off Rhodes and various other places they were given Malta and Gozo by the Emperor Charles the fifth and

settled in for the long haul. There were several battles with Muslim invaders and the Knights came out on top and were eventually very wealthy through certain activities at sea shall we say. There were quite a few Grand Masters over time and a few of them built their own residences. One of these is the Grand Masters residence on Gozo and it's now a hotel."

"Please continue Mr Baptiste, this is fascinating." She tried to look interested, but inside John assumed she was simply attempting to work out whether he was sane or insane.

"Well, anyway, this whole island was once known as an island of serpents and even now the people believe that St. Paul came here and subdued the snakes. The whole thing is a propaganda tool used by the Christians in fact

and in reality it simply meant that the Christians had kicked the serpent worshippers in to touch. At least, that's what most scholars believe. My research is revealing a much deeper undercurrent within the Christian or should I say Catholic Church and it has far reaching implications. Anyway, because this island was once occupied by serpent worshippers the discovery of these skulls in association with the serpent icons also discovered on the dig came to my attention and so I wrote to Mattia Presti for permission to see the skulls."

"Why are you so interested in serpent worshippers Mr Baptiste?" She asked, taking out a note pad and jotting down a few extra words.

"Because my job at Oxford was to collate and uncover the truth of the serpent worship that had been started back in Victorian times. For some reason several researchers had uncovered this widespread worship and written books, but then nothing, total silence. I discovered that the Christian authorities had put a stop to the research and that was that."

Just saying these few words started to bring his mind back to its normal state. Thoughts began formulating inside his mind; thoughts that began to answer some disturbing questions.

"I see. So you were here to see some snake peoples skulls and next thing you know you are in a mental institute under suspicion of murder? Is that about right?" She scribbled away again and crossed her legs. John's eyes darted to the movement and he saw the creamy smooth skin of her inside thigh and suddenly he lost his train of thought.

"Sorry, yes, that's about right." His eyes lingered. She swapped legs and this time he caught a fleeting glance of her white knickers. "Oh god John, stop it, you're a married man.

No I'm not. Oh, right." His thoughts brought him back to the god-awful world he now occupied and the reality of his own insane life.

"Quite." She had noticed his interest and for some reason slightly widened her legs in a subconscious act of tease. She remembered, she used to do the same to her old history teacher back in college while he was lecturing about

the damned war of independence. It used to throw him off track too. "OK. So, this murder or whatever it was. What exactly happened?"

"Oh right, that. Well I went to the Museum and was ushered upstairs by the guard. When I got there the whole place was empty and so I walked down the corridor and looked for Presti's office. I knocked but there was no reply, so I simply tried the door and went in. Presti was dead on the floor in a pool of blood with a cord around his neck and a note." The blood was rushing from his face again as he remembered the sight and the stench of the dead.

"Now, the police say that there was no cord or note, but you insist there was right?" She turned the pages of her little black note pad and swapped legs yet again. John tried to look away.

"Yes there was a cord and a note. It was to me!"

"Mattia Presti. Dead. Take notes Mr Baptiste. Brotherhood of the Snake. That's what it said isn't it?" She read from a page in

her note pad.

"Yes, exactly. What do you suppose it means?" he looked anxiously at this vision of beauty and hoped for an answer where there had been none before.

"Well, somebody is obviously trying to tell you something Mr Baptiste, may I call you John?" She relaxed a little in her chair and John couldn't decide whether she was warming to the idea that he wasn't in fact mad after all.

"Yes, precisely, but the police simply won't believe me. They can't add it up at all."

"Well, they have their man John and that's all they care about now. Let me see what I can do. Have you spoken to the consulate? Or the Canadian Embassy?" She stood, put her pad in her handbag and stopped the recorder.

"Yes, they have been in to see me, but they said there's nothing they can do and that the course has to run. They asked if I wanted to contact anybody or get a lawyer. I told them to inform my peers at Oxford. That's about it. Nothing else I can think of." He moved sideways, his back ached and his butt was sore.

"I will do some digging John. I believe you. I don't know why, but I believe you. I think there's something strange happening here. You seem like an ordinary guy to me." And with that she turned, pressed the red button near the door and waited for the nurse. John watched her go and watched as the cotton dress moved delicately against her perfectly formed behind. For the first time since the death of his wife he had an erection.

"John, wake up." A soft whisper from an angelic being breathed words into his mind. He opened his eyes wide. He was in Africa again. The same dusty streets, the same huts, the same palaces. On his right the men jeered at him and on his

left two policemen thumped sticks into their palms. The air was filled with a lament, but this time the single voice was more, it was almost a chord. The music filled his head and called him forward. Again he ran and again the great white palace, with the familiar garden and white wall evaded him.

But this time he stopped dead, pulled his feet together and shouted at the top of his voice, "Nooooo. I will not do it anymore."

Suddenly he was face down in the garden. He could hear the birds in the trees, the breeze in the willow and smell the roses and the lilies. He could feel the razor sharp flint beneath his fingers and naked body. The music had stopped and suddenly he was cold, freezing even. He drew in his legs and arms and hunched up like a baby in the womb. The cold was permeating every part of his being. His muscles seemed rigid and his bones like icicles. He shivered and rocked, his breath forming great clouds of red and white smoke to rise in the air. He watched as two dragons formed in the clouds, first a red dragon in the white cloud and then a white dragon in the red cloud. They writhed around like newborn worms until they finally saw each other and began to fight a duel to the death.

He looked away, his eyes falling to the earth and then he saw the body of his naked battered wife again, lying on a bed of scented roses this time. Her body was pure white and quite still, but scarred and bruised as it always was. He scrambled to all fours cursing at the flint, which tore into his flesh, as he moved. He wanted to see her face, to touch her, to caress her, to lie with her. He drove forward through the pain of the flint and breathed a sigh of relief as he finally made it to the bed of roses. He grasped for the head and lifted it up gently from behind. The face was not hers, it was that New York reporter and her eyes were green slits like the serpent he had seen before. She opened her mouth and hissed into his face. He dropped her head with a loud thump, keeled over into the sharp flint floor and everything faded into darkness.

Chapter 4

OceanofPDF.com

Cardinal Sin

It was a sunny day in the Piazza San Pietro. Tourists were walking around snapping pictures every few feet and asking nuns to pose with their children. The various kinds of police, guards, priests and clergy made the whole bustling scene one of the great human wonders of the world with their various costumes and faces. The architecture of the Vatican was simply a backdrop to this moving tapestry. To most it was a spectacle to be seen and enjoyed, a spirited movement of the living thing that was belief. But Cardinal Ben Sira thought otherwise. He hated the whole thing and thought the so-called people ought to be banned from even entering the enclave.

These lower beings didn't deserve to be anywhere near this place. But alas, times had changed and so too had the Church.

It had given in to the modern ways of openness and compassion at least on the surface.

"This will do driver." Said the Cardinal in his usual melancholy way. He didn't fraternise with his servants, he simply ordered them. He wasn't interested in their tiny lives; he had more important things to think about.

The large black Mercedes limousine pulled up on the Via Paolo VI and the Cardinal was escorted from the vehicle by two plain-clothes security service men. He walked slowly towards St. Peters Cathedral, ignoring the adoring looks of the pilgrims and tourists alike. His long slim head facing forward and looking slightly austere. His Roman nose pointed positively skyward. These were the moments he hated the most, being stared at by commoners. They ought to be removed from this sacred place, along with that damned Pope. That's what happens when you have democracy, people vote, and in this case the line had been upset by this idiot of a man. Well, his time was nearly up; Cardinal Ben Sira was about to make sure of it. The Order had finally given in to his demands and the Cardinal had his way. Yes, it did take a little

arm bending and a couple of accidental deaths, but eventually they saw the light and gathered the evidence they needed against the present incumbent on the papal throne.

Eventually the Cardinal and his entourage arrived at the papal apartments. He could have driven in the usual way and around the back, down Santamaura and parked in the official lots, but they would have been expecting him that way and this time he wanted to surprise them, even if it did mean walking through the crowds of idiot followers. Over the years of life spent in the heart of intense cunning Cardinal Ben Sira knew every trick there was and it was time to bring them all to the game.

He stood in the cold anti-chamber, lined with gold crosses and paintings of previous Popes and waited to be called. He picked at some grey hair that was dangling from his cloak and let it fly gently to the shiny oak floor, his disdain showing in every movement. His arrival had been unexpected as he had planned and he had immediately issued his communication with one of the papal aids. It had been a parchment letter, sealed with red wax and the Cardinal's ring. No other must see the contents.

Within minutes the heavy doors swung open and the Cardinal was called in. He paused and took one last look at the corridor around him. The papal guards with their ancient swords looked like something from a Hollywood movie, his own secret service men with their modern firearms neatly hidden had the appearance of the fabled men in black. The purple silky curtains swayed gently in the light breeze that came in through the window and the soft noise of Rome's distant traffic were moments he would capture in his mind on this fateful day. The Cardinal swept into the papal inner chamber and closed the great doors behind him. Moments later the Pope was dead.

The whole world erupted into a mad media fair. First the sad tales of a Pope who had spent less than a year on

Christendom's mightiest throne. His childhood, his youth and his days as a Cardinal in France were played to death on every channel. The Piazza San Pietro teemed with hundreds of thousands of people, officially mourning the death of their beloved representative of God on earth. Officials from

around the world were gathering for the funeral and every hotel room was over booked and over charged. Rome was buzzing again.

In the background the officials of the Catholic Church were discussing the new leadership. Cardinal Ben Sira was being put forward by more than fifty percent of the enclave. He had an excellent track record but in his youth he had some troublesome links with the Nazi party in Poland. It was felt that this could be whitewashed and so the decision was made, before the old Pope had even been laid to rest.

Soon the world's media spotted the white smoke and had a new white robed Father of the Church and all adored him. His statements spoke of peace and reconciliation and his cleverly air-brushed posters gave him the appearance of a true deity.

His Nazi past was placed out in the open and forgotten by almost everybody within a few days everybody except the conspiracy theorists on the internet. Pope Urban IX was in power with the full authority of his fellow Cardinals. He was going to make some changes.

"Our Brothers from Malta wish to speak with you Holy Father." The tall elegant papal aid bowed low as he spoke to Urban.

The Pope, seated on a golden throne, raised his hand in a gesture of approval like a Caesar of ancient Rome.

Moments later a contingent of the Knights of Malta walked solemnly into the large wood-lined hall. Their steps echoed on the stone floor and were all the louder for the silence in the room. The hall was in the heart of the Vatican. A sacred and secret place, reserved only for private meetings and certainly

not for public view. It was here that Pope Pius had signed his secret deals with Hitler and Mussolini and almost in the next moment with Britain and America. It was here that Popes had sent millions out to die and signed warrants of death for countless more. It was here that the secret orders of the Catholic Church reported back their tales of deception and deceit. And yet the Church needed new fresh blood to show the face of peace, to front

up and face the more open and intrusive world in which they had suddenly woken up. Urban was himself a man of the past and the present. He hankered back to times of ultimate power and yet understood the subtle politics of the prevailing era.

The three knights, dressed in ordinary dark blue suits, stopped around six feet from the Pope and knelt. Heads bowed low they awaited the order to rise, each one fearful of this new man, wondering what he would be like and how he would take their news.

"Rise," spoke the Pope, as he too stood and walked towards the long thin window, which looked down upon St Peter's,

"what is it?"

The three knights stood and the centre, stocky character with sweat breaking out on his brow cleared his throat to speak.

"We have an issue in Malta Holy Father. There is a Canadian man who has gotten a little tangled up in the discovery of our ancient friends."

The Pope turned quickly and looked directly into the eyes of the speaking knight.

"What? What do you mean, tangled up? Explain!" His hands were now firmly planted on his hips.

"Well you see, he has been searching for the serpent worshippers of the past for his university in England and he came upon the discovery on Gozo, you remember?"

"Of course I remember fool. We have them here now do we not? And the ground has been cleared, the people removed?"

Urban looked around at his two official looking advisors still standing near the golden chair. They nodded.

"Yes, that's right, but the local police have arrested this Professor Baptiste for the murder of the head archaeologist.

We have tried to cover our tracks and we think that he will be found guilty and the matter laid to rest, but your predecessor wanted us to inform him of every possible problem, given the gravity of the situation Holy Father." The knight bowed his head low, avoiding the Popes deep penetrating eyes, he had learned many psychological tricks in his time.

"Remove him." Urban turned back towards the window and watched the foolish believers and common tourists stand in line to see the remains of the last Pope.

"Yes Holy Father." And with that the three knights bowed low once more, turned and walked away.

The next day, early in the morning, a private plane arrived anonymously at Malta airport. It taxied to the end of the runway where two green Alpha Romeo cars awaited with the engines running. It bore the insignia of the knights of Malta and had blackened windows to hide those within. The plain stopped close by the car and the door opened almost at the same time as the door of the car. Steps were lowered down.

Three men, dressed in blue suits made their way down and into the cars escorted by another three men in black suits and black shades. The cars sped off and made for Valletta.

"Quick Mr Baptiste, you must leave now." A voice came from the blackness. It was early morning and he wasn't asleep.

"What is it?" He said through drowsy eyes and a sore throat.

"We must move fast, your life is in danger." John's eyes were now open wide. It was dark and there was a small squat figure of a man untying his wrists and ankles. The vault door was wide open behind him and the man looked furtive and frightened.

Finally the bonds were loosened and John was up on his feet.

"Here, put these on quick." The little man had brought jeans, a T-shirt and a pair of old shoes. John dressed quickly and followed the man out into the

darkened hallway. Outside of his prison cell John was in a long corridor with similar styled vault doors lining the way. Small red lights made it possible to see the dim path ahead and he raced with his new found friend down the terrifying path ahead. His legs shot searing jolts of pain up into his head every time they hit the floor but the sense of freedom overcame any pain. He was exhilarated by the thought of seeing the outside world again and had to hold back for his tiny comrade.

They reached the end of the hall where they came to a junction. Left or right? He waited for his aid.

"This way Mr Baptiste," came the response, "quickly now."

They turned left and ran past a desk with the slumped figure of a nurse on the floor.

"I had to pursued him to let me see you." Came the answer to John's imagined question.

Finally they found a door to the outside world and John had to stop abruptly as he found himself on a stone walkway with the sea crashing on the rocks below. They were on the battlements of Valletta and the hospital was built right on top. The sun was emerging from the dark blue sea on the horizon and for a moment John imagined relaxing with a beer and watching it rise, but the pull on his arm brought him back into the real world and he whirled around towards the right and ran like a

hound from hell itself.

Finally after what seemed an age they found a stone stairway leading down to the cobbled medieval streets below and a waiting car. It was a green Alpha Romeo.

Chapter 5

OceanofPDF.com

Freedom

The journey seemed to take forever. The car rocked from side to side as the driver, a dark shadowy character who occasionally grunted, threw the vehicle into every corner. The sun was now over the horizon and lighting the way enough for John to see the dusty streets of the cosmopolitan Valletta speed by. He recognised the bus depot with its bright yellow Bedford buses just outside the old city gates. They raced past a small statue and almost killed a horse and an old man that could not move out of the way fast enough. Then onward, past dirty looking shops, cafes, warehouse and new building works. It reminded him of images of the Middle East he had seen on the news and he imagined Palestinian youths throwing rocks at armed Israeli troops. The backdrop would have fooled anyone.

He turned to look at the mysterious little character that had helped him to escape. A stocky miniature weight lifter is all he could imagine. His features were kind of Italian, dark skinned, like he had spent too much time in the sun. His leather-skin wrinkled up at the edge of his eyes, as if he had spent a lifetime smiling and the image had stuck. His stubby fingers rested on his black trousers and sported a golden band of marriage. There was a hint of grey stubble, probably from the night's activity interrupting his usual routine. He turned to John and gave him a deep smile of reassurance. This guy didn't seem half-bad, thought John, at least he's smiling and very few people had done that to him in a while.

"Why have you sprung me?" John asked, curiosity now taking over his confused mind.

"It will all become clear soon Mr Baptiste. Relax, you are free and safe now. We will get you away from here soon enough."

Came the high pitched, almost boyish response with another warm smile.

John looked around inside the quiet sturdy car. It seemed strange somehow. The seats were of cream leather, it had electric everything and a wonderful new smell. But there was something missing, something not right. He

pondered for a while. Was it the fact that the windows seemed darker than normal? No, not that. Was it the peculiar little flag on the dashboard? No, not that either. Then he spotted it. There was too much room. This car seemed incredibly spacious on the inside. In fact the ceiling seemed peculiarly high and the seats very low, as if it had been made especially for a ten foot human.

The thought passed him by as he noticed they were in countryside. The stark, barren landscape occasionally dotted with an olive tree and lined with dry stone walls. Goats ambled around brown fields with ruined stone farmhouses as their only defence against the powerful Mediterranean sun.

The road was thin and windy and John was glad it was so early, as the speed alone could have got them killed without oncoming traffic in the mix. As they wound their way around one bend and then another he had no idea where he was anymore. As he was jostled this way and then that he clung on to the door handle and peered intently through the darkened glass. He thought he had known Malta well, but this road had no identifiable structures. The situation hid any far off landmarks that would have helped him such as Mdina and Rabat with their pinnacles of church roofs and battlements.

Everything just looked the same and his tired mind was struggling just to keep focused on staying awake.

Suddenly they turned sharp left and off the road onto a dirt track, kicking up dust high into the air. Rubble hit the underside of the car repeatedly like a machine gun on overdrive and John hung on for dear life, his knuckles turning brilliant white. They reached the brow of a small hill and went straight over without slowing down, leaving the ground for a second and banging back down to earth with a thud. On the other side and looking down into a glistening blue cove John saw a small square, whitewashed house off to the right. He

saw the pale cream curtains twitch behind the filthy windows as the car pulled up outside and two tall official looking men emerged with small firearms in hand.

"OK Eliphas, its us, we got him." Shouted the small guy as he got out of the car and walked towards the men with his arms held up. "Come on Mr Baptiste, this is our safe house."

John opened the heavy car door with a shove and staggered out into the bright light of the morning sun. He walked around to the house side of the car and followed the arm movements and shouts of "come on come on" inside. He lowered his head to enter and he noticed that the entire house was comprised of just two rooms, the one he could see and an obvious bathroom to the rear. There were two windows on either side of the square room and they were adorned with iron bars. He was surprised to find the main room remarkably modern and well equipped even for the rich capitalist nations. There were three huge flat TV screens along the back wall and four computer terminals beneath. In the centre there was a clear glass table with some cold food and drink and the floor was terracotta tiled with a few cream rugs scattered around. It was bright and airy with sunlight streaming in from a large glass roof light and cool air being pumped in from somewhere he could not see. Around the glass table were several very modern but comfortable chairs and he was motioned to sit and eat. They didn't have to tell him twice. He yanked at a banana and devoured it within seconds, grabbing a big pale green apple as he worked his way through the fruit bowl like a crazed and starving hyena.

He was joined by his small friend, Eliphas, the other gun toting man and the driver, who John now saw was in fact a kind of gentle giant character with soft, sad eyes and only a few whispers of grey hair left. He bit into a crisp juicy apple and savoured every moment, washing it down with a large glass of thick, cool orange juice. The two gunmen looked remarkably like brothers or even twins, with dark suits, shades sticking out of their breast pockets and sleek black

greasy hair. They said nothing, but sat silently waiting. The driver poured John another drink.

"Now Mr Baptiste, you will have many questions I am sure."

Said the small guy who had now taken up residence opposite him at the table.

"Yeah, you could say that." He replied with a mouth full of apple, the juice dripping down into his beard.

"Well, we ought to fill you in and we shall, but first we have to leave you alone for a few hours while we go and cover our tracks. You understand of course." And with that they all stood. "Come on boys. Oh, Mr Baptiste, please stay here until we return, it is for your own safety. If you try to leave, you will be shot by the Maltese police, they don't like you anyway and, well, er, the laws on this island are not so well respected as they are in England."

"But…" It was too late, they had already slammed the door behind them before John could blurt the words from his apple filled mouth. The last thing he heard from them was the lock clicking and the car speeding away at high speed.

He stood to look out of the window and saw a huge plume of grey dust rising high in the sky and eventually falling to the ground, making everything appear grey and monotone. Then everything was silent. He was alone again, a prisoner of a different kind, but this time in a little more luxury. It was so silent that he could hear his own heart beat. It grew louder with every second. He held the apple to his mouth to take one last bite, but for some reason he began to feel drowsy and quickly looked for somewhere to fall. He noticed a small brown couch near the table and quickly made for it, falling headfirst into the soft cushions just in time. The apple fell from his grasp and rolled across the floor, hitting the door before rocking slowly to a full stop.

He awoke suddenly in his dreams again. He was falling from a deep blue sky that felt like home. A few tiny white clouds drifted by and for the first time in days he felt free once more.

He saw images in the clouds of children playing on swings and slides, of a beautiful garden with trees swaying in the warm summer breeze. There was a woman, pushing one of the children on a swing and calling to the other to be careful.

She was tall, slim and very much alive. It was Catherine. She existed here, in a world that she never knew, a world of family and fun. A world they would never share together.

The image faded and blew away as the clouds dissipated.

Then the earth below began to grow, filling his vision with a green and sandy landscape. He saw the outline of the continents as the globe span around. America, Australia, Asia, Europe and then the African continent appeared and the spinning ceased. He began to inadvertently and unintentionally fall towards the western edge of this dark place, falling as fast as his sinking heart.

He hit the ground with a loud thud but felt no pain, just sadness at being back in the grip of this torment once more.

He lay face down in the dry dust and just wanted to stay there, to not see this horror again. But the dream was not his to control so easily and he scraped his hands through the hot earth, finally pushing himself upright. Here he was yet again, in familiar territory, the old mocking men, the thumping policemen and the white palace before him. The alien lament filled the air like a consuming fire, engulfing his senses in the heat of the music. He needed those flames. He needed to find the source of the fire and to cast himself upon it as a sacrifice to his lost existence. And so he ran again, a victim of his own desires. He knew that the palace would evade him. He knew that the image he would find there would be terrible, but he needed to see the progression of his dream. He felt strongly that it was leading him somewhere. Here deep in his dream he had a purpose and a goal his wife. Here he felt he would overcome his darkest thoughts and that he would find

answers. He even imagined that if he could control the dream he would wake up and Catherine would be alive again. And so he ran. He ran like a man possessed, determined to reach that shimmering white palace that promised answers to his ultimate questions.

But it simply stayed in the same stagnant position on the horizon, refusing steadfastly to come any closer. Sweat poured from every part of his

bedraggled body. It ran like rivers of molten lava over his brow, burning his eyes and blurring his sight. His muscles ached and his head pounded to the beat of the thumping policemen who were always one step behind. He collapsed, a spent wreckage of a man, distraught and alone. He could go on no more.

When he opened his eyes again he was in the garden. This time he was beside the naked figure of the woman. Who was she this time? Would this be his wife or the reporter? He slowly raised his weary head to see. The white form was blurred, undulating in the heat of his sight. He rubbed furiously at his eyes, pressing the palms of his hands into the sockets of his skull. He blinked several times to try and clear his vision and gradually the body took form. It was a dreadful vision of a mutilated body, drained of all life, scourged by hatred. The head was unclear, just a glimmering ball. He blinked and rubbed again and this time shot back with fear as the image before him took shape and revealed a large snake-like head with glowing green eyes and glistening scaly skin.

He sat back on his legs and stared at the form before him a mocking amalgamation of his sick imagination. Its scaly neck merging with the delicate white but bruised skin of the torso.

The body moved, contorted with pain and writhing like a fish from water. The head shot from side to side as if trying to escape the body. It came to rest and slowly lifted and spoke, staring straight into the depth of John's mind.

"Save me. Save me." The head was hissing words of fear and distress and John sobbed, not knowing what else to do. "Save

me. Save me."

Again and again the tormented being echoed the words around John's mind. "Save me. Save me."

"How?" John cried, "What am I supposed to do? How can I save you? What, who are you?"

"You." Came the response.

Chapter 6

OceanofPDF.com

The Fishermen

"What do you mean he's escaped?" Nina knew it was a stupid question, the little Maltese lady behind the reception desk meant that John Baptiste had escaped, it was pretty obvious.

"How?"

"Listen lady, all I know is that I came to work this morning and there was hell all around. One of the nurses had been knocked out and is now in the infirmary and that crazy American had gone. OK? If you want to know anymore then ask the police." The receptionist seemed fraught enough. She had only just started this job because the children had finally married and left home. Her husband had warned her not to take the position, saying that the crazies were always trouble.

She was only glad she hadn't been on duty or she too could have ended up on a hospital bed. In the back of her mind she was struggling with how to keep the information away from her husband or he would be sure to put a stop to her new found freedom. She'd been housewife, mother and lover long enough and needed a new life. OK, she couldn't kill the housewife too much, or the lover, but she sure as hell could find some new friends and still be useful. She sipped at her coffee, the third in an hour and tried to hold back her own fear of the new world she was now in.

"Grazzi." Said Nina as she turned to go back out to the warm morning sun. That bloody Canadian, what was he playing at?

This really ruined everything. Now she would have to call in help before too long. If only she could find him herself, then she would really impress. Her mind raced ahead, playing the game one step at a time like moving the pieces on a jigsaw puzzle. She'd been trained for this after all. It was her role to track these kinds of things down. She had all she needed, it was only a small island and until the story broke she might be safe enough not saying a word and finding Baptiste herself.

But then, the story would soon get back to her superiors and

she would be in trouble for not saying anything. What to do?

Well, she could give it a few hours and claim she knew nothing about it. Yes, that was it. Now, where would you go if you had just escaped from a mental institute? Well first thing would be to get clothes and money and then head for transport. That would either mean a taxi or the buses to the airport. Well, no money, no taxi or bus. Assuming he had managed to steal some then would he head for the airport?

No, that would be really stupid, he'd head for a boat!

Nina Lamia, the New York reporter decided to check out the harbours. She'd start with Marsamxett Harbour because it was the closest to the old city.

Her mind was set and she was now out on the street. She'd parked her little blue Fiat a block away on St Mark's and as she hit the street she ran. A little up St Patrick's she bumped into a surely looking character dressed in blue with his neck tie hanging like a loose noose. She tripped and fell to the floor.

The man's friend, also dressed in a blue suit, but with his tie neatly pulled up, helped her to her feet.

"Somebody's in a hurry." Said the first man in blue. "Kif int?"

"Sorry." She said as she was pulled handsomely to her feet.

"It means 'how are you?' In Maltese"

"Oh, yeah, sorry, fine thank you. I didn't see you and I was in a hurry." She answered looking into the dark eyes of the second man. He was kind of good looking for a Maltese, with a little Italian style and a glint in his smile.

"Well, be careful now. There's been an escapee at the hospital and he's very dangerous. He killed a man a few days back and now he's on the loose. We

are advising people to keep a look out for a single man acting strangely and you pretty ladies ought to be aware," smiled the tall good-looking one.

"How do you know this?" Nina asked, already knowing these just had to be policemen.

"It's our job to track him down young lady. Sahha." And with that both men smiled, turned and made towards the hospital.

Damn it, she was only just ahead. The race was on. She brushed herself down, noticing the tear on her yellow blouse just above her left breast and the dirt on her brown skirt. She held her handbag in one hand and her chest with the other as she ran back to her car. There was a spare set of clothes in there she was sure. She sweated as the sun began to pound Malta with its special dry heat. Arriving at the little car she grappled with her keys and opened up. Jumping in she revved the engine and kicked the air conditioning on. The cool air eventually came through as she rummaged through her second bag on the back seat. She found it at last and pulled out the black almost see-through blouse and black short skirt. She had to change both of course, because the new colours simply wouldn't match. No matter what the urgency, a lady's got to look good. She unbuttoned her torn blouse and pulled it off, trying everything she could think of to hide her dignity.

Luckily this was a quiet back street of Valletta and there were only occasional passers-by and cars. What made it doubly worse was that she hadn't put on a bra because of the heat of the day. She tried to unravel her new blouse with one hand whilst firmly holding her 38d bosom with the other. It was no use and she finally decided to just go for it and use both hands properly. At that moment a uniformed policeman walked by with a wry smile on his face and a growing happiness.

Finally she had managed to swap her blouse, now for the skirt.

She wriggled the dirty brown garment to the floor of the car, pulled up the pink g-string that had moved in the process and finally wriggled again into the new black version. The policeman walked past again, enjoying his morning stroll and catching a heart-stopping glimpse of Nina' black pubic

hair as she finally struggled with the skirt over her hips. She tossed the spoiled clothes in the back, put on her two inch heeled

Italian leather shoes, smiled at the fairly rugged looking policeman and sped off down St Mark's. Taking a sharp right on Old Bakery, then left on Melita and finally another right down Republic, ignoring all the signs, traffic lights and pedestrians along the way. She shot out of the walled city like a bullet from a gun with the Maglio Gardens just a blur on her left and headed for the first of dozens of places she could think of where boats could be hired Grand Harbour.

Malta has been on the human crossroads of the Mediterranean for thousands of years. It has played a leading role in the ups and downs of the whole area and a lot of this is down to the number of natural harbours, perfect for the sea-faring Mediterranean cultures. From the Pheonicians, Carthangenians and Romans to the Saracens, Normans and even the British and Germans, this little island has played an incredibly disproportionate role in the various power struggles. But the great use of the natural harbours really took effect with the installation of the Knights of St John back in 1526. The knights soon established themselves and either won over the inhabitants or ignored them completely.

Massive building works began and castles, forts and sophisticated towns erupted as the wealth of the knights and the piracy funds poured in. By 1530 the grand fleet of the Order sailed from the Roman port of Cittavecchia and entered Valletta harbour, lead by the first ever armour-plated carrack, the Santa Anna.

At this time Valletta had no fortified harbour, just the welcoming natural curves and the calm sea that was a natural place for boats to settle and had been for hundreds if not thousands of years. The only surviving battlement there was Fort St. Angelo and so the Order had taken up residence and eventually the whole of Valletta sprang from this one rich font. In time the whole area was a building site, with walls and bastions taking shape, not just here, but across the whole island. But Valletta was the jewel in the crown of Malta and it shone like never before, even when the hoards of Saracens set sail to bring down the rich Christian Order that had been

stealing her wealth at sea. The Knights and the people of Malta stood firm against incredible odds and eventually defeated the Muslims.

Now, even after the later invasion of the Nazi's and their subsequent defeat at the hands of the British, Valletta's harbour was shadowed by the immense but graceful stone walls of the fortified city and Nina found herself driving along the harbour road as if the Saracens themselves had been spotted on the horizon. The history of the glorious Order of knights was surprisingly not lost upon her and she felt their collected power and wisdom run through her veins as she pulled the car over and jumped out, almost breaking her ankle with the heeled shoes.

She grabbed her handbag and slammed the door shut, pulling the hemline of her short skit down to just above her crotch.

Nina had no trouble in attracting the attention of a couple of old fishermen who sat on the harbour front with cigarettes in hand and glasses of wine. They often spent many hours down here, watching the colourful boats bob up and down in the wake of a passing trawler. The little painted eyes on the small fishing boats peering back.

"Bongornu signora." Said one of the tiny grey men as he tipped his cap and gave her a cheeky smile. He turned for a brief moment to his friend and winked, returning his gaze once more to the Venus with a handbag who stood before him.

"Bongornu to you too." She smiled back and turned on her feminine charms. "Do you have a spare glass of that wine for a thirsty and hot woman?"

"Si, si. You cana drink outa dis." He opened his battered and ancient leather satchel bag and pulled out a purple plastic cup, pouring a small amount of the red Maltese wine out and handing it over.

The little bench where the two men idled their hours away

was large enough to squeeze Nina on and she gently backed herself in-between them, knowing she was almost revealing the colour of her knickers

as she did so. The up to now silent fisherman clapped his hand to his brow and muttered a few hale Mary's. Nina settled down and took a sip of the wine, it was awful, in fact it was probably the worst wine she had ever tasted in her life. No wonder the Maltese were not well known for their winemaking skills. She swallowed hard, forcing the near-vinegar fluid to go down. As if the wine hadn't been bad enough, these two old men stunk of fish and something else she couldn't quite put her finger on, nor probably wanted to.

"It's a nice day." She said as she almost wrenched sipping some more wine.

"Si. The sun, he's a kind to us and the sea isa like a sleepin babino." Grinned the once silent partner on her right.

"Yes, I'm sure." Nina kept her nose firmly lodged in the plastic cup to avoid the intense smell. "There was an escape at the hospital last night. Did you hear anything about it?" She decided enough was enough and to get on with the job in hand.

"Si. It's a bad business. Un certo Americano pazzesco, stupid Americano." Nodded the one on her left with an almost serious face.

"Have they caught him yet?" She asked, attempting to steer the conversation and sipping more revolting wine.

"No ed io dubitano di che, they probably will not." Said the one on the left.

"Oh, why do you think that?" Maybe she was on to something. She had to try.

"La polzia e stupido, they couldn't find a fish in the sea." He replied with a wry smile and a knowing look. "Besides

signora, the man dida not geta outta himself."

She was on to something. She knew there had to be a lead down here at the harbour but she didn't expect it so quickly.

She tried to look nonchalant and sipped at her drink.

"Oh, how do you know this?" She gazed out to a passing tourist boat, on its way out to the three cities and a smooth site seeing trip.

"Vediamo tutto, we see everything. Thisa morning before the sun he decides to show his face we see the mana run alonga the wall upa there." Said the man on the right as he turned and pointed behind and above him to the dominating walls of Valletta. "There is a door there, see, from the ospedale, the hospital, it isa the backa way outa there." And he lit a smoke like the wise old man of the sea and stared at the bobbing boats with a sense of knowing.

So, John Baptiste had friends. Who the hell was it and why?

Was there more to this Canadian from Oxford than met the eye? This changed the whole thing. Baptiste would no longer be alone in need of money, clothes and a boat, he had help and that changed everything. She couldn't do this alone now, she would have to contact her superiors. She drank the dredges of her little plastic cup handed it to the old man on her right, stood, pulled her hemline down, picked up her bag and walked away without saying anything. Her mind was a million miles away in another world. She was running through just how to explain all this away, just how she had let a stupid little academic slip her grasp.

Slowly she walked back along the stone harbour front to her little Fiat, thinking and looking down at the floor. She didn't notice the two uniformed police officers walking by scouring the harbour and heading straight for the old fishermen. She got in her car and sat as her little informers told the same things to the police.

Chapter 7

OceanofPDF.com

The Turncoats

John slowly came around and his head ached yet again. His hand reached around to the back of his head where he found a small bump. He rubbed, wondering if it had come from the fall to the floor or a statue of Mary. He looked around. He was still in that square white room in the middle of nowhere. The light had turned orange like the end of the day and he could only assume that he had been unconscious most of it. He seemed to be alone; there were no sounds or movements. He had a sudden urge to run and jumped to his feet. He ran to the door, grabbing a couple of apples and some cut meat on the way, stuffing them into his trouser pockets. He held the handle and turned it hard. Nothing happened, it wouldn't move. His heart sank and he pulled one of the apples out of his pocket and began to crunch. Then he thought. Last time he'd eaten an apple he'd fallen unconscious, maybe they were drugged. So he tried to remember exactly what had happened.

He'd been sprung from the hospital by a little man and sped away in a green car to this place. Then he had eaten a banana and an apple. No, wait, he was given a drink of orange juice.

He turned to look at the table, an empty glass. That was it, the drink was laced with some kind of sleeping drug. It was safe to eat the fruit, and so he crunched while he tried to figure out what to do.

It was a mess, his whole life was a complete mess and his dreams were even worse. What the hell was he going to do now? Where could he go? Well, maybe he could try and get to England somehow and hand himself over to more independent officials. The British were famous for their leniency weren't they? But he'd have to escape this prison first, and then get some money and a boat, it was no use trying the airport, his passport was in the hotel. God what a mess.

He finished his apple and tossed the core into a silver bin

beneath the glass table. He needed money and anything else he could get his hands on and so he started to look around.

First he tried the door to the bathroom. Thankfully it opened and first thing was to take a leak. He flushed and then noticed the window above the sink. He reached for the handle, but it was locked and barred. No escape there. Then he noticed a mirrored cabinet on his right and went straight for it. The image that greeted him was a dishevelled bearded man looking like some kind of crazy grown feral child. His beard was matted and his dark hair like Medusa's serpentine crown.

He forgot about escape for the moment and decided to freshen up. There was soap, shampoo, running water and what was this? A razor.

Within the space of twenty minutes John looked like a different man. His hair was clean and combed, his body refreshed and his beard was disappearing down the sink.

Washing his hair had been difficult because there was congealed blood at the back of his head that caused bolts of pain to run through his body as he scrubbed the blood out. He even found a change of clothes in one of the cabinets beneath the flat screen TV's in the main room and so, it now felt almost as if nobody would recognise him.

He took one last look in the mirror and his mind returned to his predicament, how could he escape this little house?

He opened every drawer he could find, tried all three windows and attempted the door again. He turned on every lamp to see if the light would bring new clues. He only noticed a tea and coffee-making machine that he hadn't before. There was simply no escape and so he sat at the glass table and ate the meat and fruit. If those guys returned he would need his energy. As he sat, chewing and thinking, his hand rested on the leg of the table and something made him twist it. It unscrewed and so he kept twisting. The thought crossed his mind that this would make an excellent weapon. As the final turn released the leg he heard a distant car and jumped up with leg in hand, leaving a precarious three-legged glass table

behind. He made for the roadside window and peered out.

There in the distance he could make out an orange dust cloud.

Tracing the cloud to the bottom he could see a car jumping up and down on the bumpy road. They were coming back.

"Right, calm John." He thought to himself. "Think this through. If I stand there," he looked at the side of the door,

"then when they enter I can hit the first one on the head and run like hell to the car." It was a stupid idea and he knew it, but it was the only one he had and the engine noise was getting louder. He quickly shot across the room and held his table leg in his hands as if it was Excalibur. His back flat against the wall he tried his best to breathe slowly and quietly and wait for the door to open.

The car stopped with a crunch of rubber on rubble and he heard four doors open and bang shut. Then the sound of shoes on gravel and mumbled speech came closer and closer. He gripped his weapon for dear life and for a brief second closed his eyes to summon up some kind of magical power. A key entered the door lock and the handle turned slowly. The door swung wide and it seemed like forever before the first man entered the room. John lunged with all his might at the large dark figure, lost his footing and fell headfirst into the glass table, smashing it into a thousand pieces.

Soon all four men were in the room, the same ones he had seen before, and they all stood above him with their hands on their hips. The tall stocky driver bent down and John closed his eyes expecting to he hit, but after a few seconds he opened them and saw the outstretched hand of this gentle giant. He took the hand and stood up, the other men brushing the shards of broken glass from his new clothes. Luckily the table was made of safety glass that didn't splinter into sharp pieces and he was soon sat on the couch with a warm cup of English tea thrust into his hands, while the two silent men swept up the mess.

There was a deep penetrating silence between them that

seemed to last for an eternity while the room was patiently cleared. John sensed for some reason that he was in no danger.

Nobody had shouted at him, pushed him or abused him in anyway. They had gently made him sit while his little friend from the early hours of the morning made him a cup of tea and simply smiled at him. If these guys were some kind of Mafia or hit men then they were very cool.

He sat, rubbed his bruises and watched the hushed crew finish off. One went outside to the car and returned with a fold up camper table that had obviously been in the trunk. They erected it in the centre of the room and made coffees all-round. They all sat and John was motioned to join them at the table with a cup of coffee in a plain white cup. He put down his empty teacup, stood, walked over, took the coffee cup and sat, looking around him at this strange group. He was desperate to know what this was all about, but for some reason didn't want to ruin such incredible silent camaraderie. He even wished that he too could be part of this amazing team. He sipped his coffee slowly, the burning sensation from the hot fluid reminding him he was fully awake. They all sipped silently, the little worn wrinkled man smiling, the driver staring blankly into space and the other two like noiseless night club bouncers ready to pounce at any moment.

Then the small guy put down his coffee and turned to John. He was to break the silence.

"I am known as Ratto by my friends Mr Baptiste and so that is what you shall call me eh? This here," he said with a big grin pointing towards the giant, "is Ritardo. The two quiet types are Levi," he pointed to the Mafia styled clean shaven Italian suited one on the right of him, "and his twin brother, Eliphas."

Both twins nodded and John knew he would have to find some difference between them if he were to be able to tell them apart. He spotted a little dimple on Levi's cheek and so noted nodded to them all.

"Call me John." He said as if he were attending an Alcoholics

Anonymous meeting. "I'm sorry about the table."

"Si. That's a ok Mr Baptiste, we understanda. We shoulda told you whata wasa happening." Levi spoke for the four in his beautiful Italian accent that united with his rugged good looks must have broke many hearts.

"Levi's right Mr Baptiste, I mean, John. We were in a hell of a hurry this morning. You see, we broke you out against our real orders and so we needed to cover our tracks and have alibi's should, how you English say, the sheet eet the fan." John looked into Ratto's eyes and for all he could see he was telling the truth, there was not a glimmer of falsehood in there. Ratto, however small and worldly looking spoke much better English than the others, only occasionally slipping back into that partial Maltese-Italian dialect. "That's why we had to drug you I am afraid. I know it'sa nota normal for a man in your work of life, but itsa normal for us in ours."

"So what's all this about?" Asked John as he finished his coffee and placed it on the table. Eliphas took the cup, stood, walked over to the machine and poured another, handing it straight to John.

"You willa finda thata coffee will helpa you against the drugs, Mr Baptiste." Came the smooth Italian voice of Eliphas.

"Well John, it's a little complicated and I really don't want to ruin your day, but you are in serious danger now." Ratto said.

"Ruin my day! You have to be kidding, I'm having the time of my life Mr Ratto." John's sarcasm wasn't lost on them and even Ritardo let out a deep laugh.

"Ha, good, you have a sense of the humour. That will be good for you from now on." Ratto rocked back in his modern metal chair and with coffee in hand began to tell a tale that would shock John and change his life even more.

It turned out, according to Ratto, with the odd interjection from Eliphas, Ritardo and Levi, that John had stumbled into a major secret of the Catholic Church by pure accident and that somebody somewhere had slipped up and killed Mattia Presti instead of paying him off.

"The orders from the superiore had been confused somewhere along the way and well, Signora Presti is now without her husband. She will be taken care of." Finished Ritardo's interruption of Ratto's speech.

"What Ritardo means," Said Ratto, slapping Ritardo on the shoulder with the back of his hand, "is that Signora Presti will not want for anything of course."

"I see." John said, not totally sure, but slowly beginning to comprehend. "So you are in the Mafia then?" The question was followed by riotous laughter and Eliphas actually fell off his chair in hysterics. John assumed there must have been something funny in his question and couldn't help but smile himself at the obvious good humour of these now friendly faces. The laughter died down and Ratto explained:

"No, John, we ain't no Mafioso. They is just fools who don't know nothing. They is just used if you like, by the ones above to do their bidding see? Anyway, thing is this is much bigger than you can possibly imagine. The Church…"

"Which church?" John interrupted.

"The Church, the Church, Roma. What other church is there?

Anyways the Church was powerful once, it was the eternal Church. Nowadays people assume itsa dyin. They is wrong though. The Church is in fact fighting back and has been for years, only the time is coming for the finale." Ratto stood and went to fetch another coffee, leaving John to think about his words for a moment.

"What's that got to do with me?" Came Johns thought out

response, leaving the issue of what the Church was up to and focusing on his own issues. Ratto threw him a lighter and a packet of cigarettes and John almost jumped at them.

Eliphas and Levi stood and said they needed to "do the rounds" and so promptly left the building. John could hear them crunching around outside.

Ratto then explained that John had stumbled upon a discovery by the Maltese archaeologists that should never have been released. The dig, beneath the old Grand Masters residence on Gozo, which was now a modern, five star hotel, had not in fact been authorised by Rome. The land was still owned, it seems, by the Church as the hotel itself was part of their business empire. As soon as the Catholic scientific and historical departments heard about the find they moved in to clear things up, taking everything back to Rome with them. Mattia Presti was supposed to have been paid off, not bumped off. It seems John had walked in on a mess and found himself a pawn in a bigger game.

John understood that part, but what he couldn't understand was why a little skull would cause so much trouble and what on earth it had to do with the Catholic Church.

"Why are these artefacts so important to the Church then?"

John looked directly at Ratto for an answer. Ritardo coughed and fidgeted.

"The skull and the other things there screw up Christian history a little." Ratto's slightly Italian accent died as he carefully chose his words. "You see, the tale goes as you know, that St. Paul came to Malta and told the serpents to leave." John knew this of course, but had always thought it was a propaganda story of Christians getting rid of serpent worshippers and not actual snakes.

"Yeah, sure, but that's just a cover story for Christianisation of Malta and various other islands. Its even true of St. Patrick in Ireland." John answered.

"Yes Mr Baptiste, that's right, it is, but it also holds another secret that the Church don't want telling. Around the time that this story was created there were serpent worshippers on the island, but they were Gnostic Ophites, Christians Mr Baptiste, real Christians, not these Catholics or other denominations we know today. You see Christianity is wrong as it stands today and it has always been a huge lie." Ratto went on to explain that the early Christians had been worshippers of Sophia or wisdom and this had been symbolised as a snake across the world. In fact the early so-called pagans of the world had all worshipped these snakes, which is why they are

found on ancient structures and in all the religions of the world. But things changed, a power struggle ensued and an empire was built, the new Holy Roman Empire, based upon images of a crucified man.

"But you see Mr Baptiste, even this image itself is taken from the ancient serpent religion. The snake was crucified as an offering on a tree, it was our saviour, it was wisdom, true knowledge, true enlightenment through knowledge. They took this symbolic crucifixion of the snake and turned it into a man, a real man." Ratto was enthused, as if he knew more.

He then explained that even the biblical story of the shroud in the tomb was a direct result of the assumed resurrection properties of the snake, who also slithered into dark caves and sloughed its skin off. It was, according to Ratto, a direct result of the worship of the snake that this Shroud of Jesus became so important. On Malta, these new Christians came and wiped out the priests and worshippers in a deadly battle, leaving nobody alive and virtually re-populating the entire island with people from Sicily and the western coast of Italy. They did exactly the same everywhere they went, Rhodes, Crete and of course even Ireland, where the last vestiges of the cult survived, or so they thought. Then they found South America and discovered the serpent worshippers alive and strong, with the great feathered serpent deities of Quetzalcoatl and Kukulcan. So they sent in their bully boys the Jesuits and wiped them out again.

"It has been a long battle Mr Baptiste and the serpent worshippers have lost." Ratto looked sad, as if he himself had lost something.

John sat for a while and had another coffee, poured gently by Ritardo, who paced up and down. He looked outside the window, the sun was going down and the deep red sky seemed to usher in a sense of gloom.

John finally broke the silence. "So what you are saying is that these artefacts would have proven this eradication of these ancient people? But what about the shape of the skull?" It was the only missing link in John's mind.

"Yes, the discovery would have embarrassed the Vatican.

What you cannot know is that embarrassments like this have been covered up for generations. You never hear of them Mr Baptiste, because they are simply covered up. The skull, well, when you are ready, I will tell you, but you already know that these skulls have been found across the world and that it is assumed they were a result of some genetic disease or special system of shaping to make them appear to be serpent like.

That is sufficient for now I believe."

John could only assume that the sheer scale of the ancient bloodshed must have been immense and that the uncovering of this drastic measure would destroy the Church. It was a lot to take in and a lot to assimilate.

Eliphas and Levi came back in and stamped off the dust on the matt. They made a coffee and whispered something to Ratto.

"We have to go now John." Said Ratto. "You are safe here for the night. We won't lock the door this time, but please understand that if you do try and run away, we cannot protect you. There is more to learn as I am sure you are aware and we have to make plans for your safety. Remember, you never met us, you have no idea about us. You have probably guessed by now, we work on the inside." Ratto turned and motioned the

others to leave. They all walked to the door and Ritardo smiled his big warm smile and patted John on the shoulder as he walked out the door.

"OK Ratto, I'll be here in the morning." John had no idea why he said that, but he meant it.

"Good John. Be safe. There's a TV there, it works. Watch it, relax eh!" He pointed to the central flat screen. "We won't be here tomorrow though, it is a day of rest for the workers of the Order and to venture out together or even alone would draw attention. Understand?" And with that he closed the door on his way out.

John poured himself another coffee, ate some more food and relaxed on the couch and watched the incomprehensible Italian TV. Finally he found the BBC World Service channel and listened to the new Pope who had just

apologised for the murder of some Jews during the first crusade. How ironic, he thought to himself.

Eventually his mind started to take over and his eyes, although staring at the screen, saw nothing. Inside the wheels and cogs of his brain were turning over the thoughts. The world as he once knew it seemed to be a complete lie. This peaceful bunch of early Christians and apostles were not what he thought. There was more to it all than the world had been told and even now in the twenty-first century the truth was being squashed. He wanted to scream it at the world, but who would believe him? He was a mad killer from Canada on the loose on a backwater island in the Mediterranean. It was hopeless. Even if this small bunch of seemingly friendly guys could get him to safety, where would he go, what would he do.

He only knew history, he didn't know how to dig for coal or pilot planes, he didn't want to be a waiter in some out of the way restaurant or taxi drunks around on a Friday night. It was hopeless.

And then the thought crossed his mind that all of this may also be a lie. After all, why would the Catholics be so afraid of a few little artefacts anyway? But then he knew, politics and the manipulation of over a billion people in the Catholic Church alone was enough reason. Add to this the remainder of the Christian church and their various denominations and the figure seriously stacked up. The United States of America alone was a veritable powerhouse of Christian belief and that meant income. And what would the other faiths do when they found out?

Suddenly his eyes were drawn to the TV screen again as the new Pope Urban IX stood on the balcony of St. Peters. Was it John, or did the Popes eyes look positively yellow?

After a few cups of tea, a dozen cigarettes from a packet Eliphas either intentionally or not left behind and a late night movie in Italian John finally succumbed to the waiting world of his unconscious mind.

He was back in Africa, the same dusty street with the same familiar characters. The white palace stood at the end of the road and the haunting lament beckoned him forwards. But this time he stood his ground and

refused to move. The heat of the sun beat down upon his brow and he was sure he would melt. But he felt calm, he felt as if he was doing exactly what he was supposed to do, stay put. The old men ceased jeering and mocking and stood to applaud and the policeman jumped from their Toyota pickup and ran around like headless chickens as if they couldn't see him anywhere. The babbled like children and ran off into the distance screaming abuse at each other. Then suddenly the saloon bar door opened and out stepped a beautiful apparition. A tall sultry lady, dressed in a red tight fitting dress looked straight into his eyes. His gaze was drawn away from the palace, but the lament grew. He turned back and looked at the garden, trying to concentrate on his wife and the thought of saving her. The lady in red moved and it caught his eye again, drawing him yet again from his

quest. She moved so majestically, her breasts heaving beneath the skintight dress and the outline of her hips calling to him.

He closed his eyes and rubbed them. No John, keep focused.

He opened them again and the lady was closer this time. It was the reporter, she was saying something.

"Come John, I am waiting, take me." Her voice was soft and warm, it invited him in.

He crumbled under the weight of his desire. He hadn't had a woman in nearly three years and she was so tempting. Her frame and outline was so like Catherine's. Her voice so similar. Maybe she was his new life, maybe she was his new partner. He turned towards her and forgot all about his wife at the palace. The lament died away and the palace crumbled and out of the corner of his eye he could see a plume of dust as it fell to the earth.

He walked towards the lady and the men began to jeer and mock once more. He could hear the police in the distance shout and he knew they had spotted him the moment he moved. But he walked anyway straight into the arms of the waiting reporter. They fell to the ground and kissed, stroked and embraced, like they were the last couple on the planet. He ripped the dress from her firm white body and revealed the most wonderful body of light beneath. Rays of intense blinding light shot from her navel, she was some

kind of incredible angel. Eventually the light encompassed her whole body, swallowing them both in its folds. They rolled around in the dirt, kissing, caressing, his hands running along her back, over her behind and down her long silky legs. Then he stopped dead as he felt something unusual. He drew back and jumped clear of the vision. She was transforming, changing; a metamorphosis was taking place before his eyes. The light faded slowly and he saw scales where flesh had been, yellow slits where eyes had been and a hissing tongue. Her head had

grown long and thin, elongated. She, it, writhed on the floor as if trying to burst through the façade that had been the female reporter.

"Save me. Save me." Came the hissing noise.

John woke in a sweat and fell from the couch, hitting the hard tiled floor in darkness. The TV screen was a mass of white noise, hissing away like the vision from his dream. He scrambled back on to the couch and turned off the TV, wiping his brow and breathing heavy. What was happening in his mind? Why was his dream changing each time?

"Was there some kind of message? No John, don't be stupid, its just a dream and collection of things that have happened during the day. Remember your lessons on Freud and Jung you fool." He attempted to calm himself down, just as he had so many times before.

The red blinking clock on the cabinet said 3.33am. He needed to sleep; he needed to rest some more. He watched the clock flash and descended once more into the world of his unconscious.

Chapter 8

OceanofPDF.com

The Order

"Dame Lamia is on the private line Excellency." Said the grey surly knight of the first order holding out the cordless phone.

"Thank you Willoughby." Replied Grand Master Villaret. He was standing by the window in his ornate Vatican apartment, looking down on the crowds below, still queuing to see the dead Pope. These were troubled times for the Order although precious few were aware of it. This business of the snake people was a problem he wished his ancestors in the Order hadn't taken on from the papacy and the new Pope was even more hard line than the previous. He had to close down this rebellion he knew to be alive in the ranks and stop this Canadian who it seemed was becoming more problematic by the day. Villaret took the phone and motioned his aide to leave the room.

"Dame Lamia," he said in a welcoming tone, "have you found our man?" Villaret knew she had not and he knew that Baptiste was missing.

"Errm, well, not yet Excellency." She stuttered, a little surprised that news had reached him so soon.

"What leads do you have?" His short response was to the point as he slowly poured himself a glass of Port from a sturdy crystal decanter.

"Well," she stuttered, a little over awed as usual of her master,

"I know that he was aided in his escape and I know he must still be on the island somewhere because I have checked with most harbours now and the airports are watched by the police.

I have a contact on the inside with the authorities who will let me know the moment they hear anything." She was trying her best to put a good spin on the situation but Villaret knew all the tricks. He had been Grand Master of the Sovereign Order

of the Knights of Malta for nearly twenty years and before that had worked on the intelligence front for another twenty, always under the cover of his peace work. He had over ten thousand members now, more than ever and they were active in over a hundred and twenty countries providing food, medicine and care as a façade to their information gathering and control of the supply chains. The Order was in fact so powerful that they had diplomatic immunity, international sovereignty, issued their own passports, had diplomatic relations with nearly a hundred countries and were even given permanent-observer status within the UN. The price of this power was the cost of the peaceful exterior, which was paid for by charitable donations and in fact, fuelled the spread of the Catholic message and thereby perpetuated the growth of the Church. It was a perfect situation, mirrored throughout the Church in many other forms.

"You have no further leads Dame Lamia?" He sipped his port and walked back to the window remembering fondly the last time he had seen her. The warm sunlight cascaded through the long thin windows and lit the glorious room like a shining jewel. She had stood just there, near that window and the sun had shone through her thin dress, revealing her beautiful form beneath.

"Well, yes I do have a lead, but, well, is this line secure?" She was beginning to sound nervous.

"Of course it is. What's this new lead?" He was starting to get impatient with her. Maybe he had made a mistake with this one. Maybe she wasn't so good after all. Just because she had helped with the re-release of the Jesus and Mary marriage myth propaganda didn't mean she was a good field worker. He may have thousands at his beck and call, but there were few he could trust and even fewer that knew the ultimate truth at the heart of their power base. It was a burden he and his predecessors had carried for centuries.

"Well, it seems that Baptiste had been aided to escape, this

much we all know. But the police have now been through the CCTV pictures from Valletta and the escape seems to have been helped by our own people. You see, although the pictures are really quite poor, they could see

that the escape vehicle had been a green Alpha Romeo car the same ones used by our knights." She hoped this would give her more time.

Villaret thought about this for a while before answering. "Did they get a number plate?" It was an obvious question and one he knew he was using to stall for time and to collect his thoughts. The idea that this rebellion in his own Order had now gone to such extremes and so obviously shown themselves was grating him. He turned from the window and looked into the gilt edged mirror by the dark wooden door.

The reflection of this grey sixty year old man in his rich brown suit and burgundy neck tie, holding a phone and a glass of port brought his mind back down to the reality of the situation.

"No Excellency, they didn't." She stammered. Villaret knew she was struggling to take this lead any further and he knew she wanted to impress him. He decided to give her a break, after all he had been nurtured and fostered by his superiors in the past hadn't he? His mind cast back thirty odd years before, when the grand plan of the bloodline theory had been created by the Jesuit brothers. He had gone under cover in France and began spreading the rumours amongst the surrealist movement, knowing that such oblique ideas could easily surface from within the sea madness these types often swam in. But for some reason these crazy swimmers had wanted to keep these created secrets of the grail to themselves and he had been frustrated at every twist and turn. Then his superior had given him the idea of getting a couple of journalists involved and he had gone for it. He had no idea that it would have been so successful and elevate him to such a respected position in the ranks. Within the space of two short years the plot had fully surfaced into the cold light of day and the whole world had taken it hook, line and sinker. Of course the whole thing had also helped to cover up a whole host of other secret

activities as conspiracy theorists and newly invigorated researchers sprang up across the globe trying to cash in on the new wave of arcane knowledge. They were fed titbits of information and allowed to swim off and lay new eggs. All the time the intelligence services in the Church got on with the real work, while the mad fish darted around creating more and more mystery. The Church itself grew and grew, because for the first time in

decades the existence of Jesus was not being questioned, in fact it was being established. Villaret was eventually elevated to the ultimate position in the Order and he had that pivotal moment in his life to thank for it.

"Go to de Villiers and tell him, but do it in private Lamia, do you hear? In private." He was stern and forceful. He needed to make the point without exciting the idea of the rebellion in this new operative. "Tell him that we know one of the Orders cars was used in the escape and that you want a full list of the Orders operatives and where they were on the day of the escape. Get pictures of them and get that CCTV tape. Cross check them, see if you can recognise anybody. Tell nobody else about this, only de Villiers, do you understand?" He trusted his friend with his life; they had been in France together all those years ago. In fact it had been de Villiers who had spotted, or should he say, created, the links to that Jesuit Nicolas Poussin and together they had spawned a whole new outlet for the grail hunters. He remembered a couple of years ago they had both taken a well-earned break in Edinburgh and had visited that pathetic little chapel everybody had gone so mad over because of their manipulating. They had laughed so hard at the hundreds of visitors with their intent wanderings around that little place.

"OK, will do. Is there any message for him?" There was a sense of relief in her voice that he recognised from his past.

"Yes, just say, remember to be a fish out of water! He'll understand." With that Villaret pressed the red button and th

hung up. He put the phone down on the elegant 18 century lamp table and walked back to the window. The crowds were

still piling in; the cameras were still clicking away. Things out there in the real world were normal, but he knew how easily the whole thing could come toppling down. That man had to be caught. It was one thing having a conspiracy theorist claim that the Pope was a reptile, it was another to have an academic open his mouth about the genocide created by the Catholic Church, and it would be worse still if that man ever got to the real truth. He had to crush that rebellion. He had to find out who was behind the whole thing. He also knew that the prophecy was coming to fruition and the planets aligning.

The line went dead and Nina assumed her call was over. She sat alone in her hotel apartment and placed the cell phone on the single bed. Her thoughts turned back to Baptiste and she wondered what he was doing and where he was. She needed a break desperately if she was going to impress her superiors especially Villaret. He had given her a break a couple of years previously when she was placed as the go between for a novelist and a film company. The idea had been to give new life to the infamous bloodline of Jesus myth that the Order had fuelled with Jesuit aid many years before. Nobody could have predicted the massive international success of the whole thing and the billions of people that would be exposed to the greatest of Catholic secrets, even if those secrets had been a fictional creation in the first place. Villiers had been so impressed with her work that he had raised her to the position of Dame, the female equivalent of Knight and given her first order status. She was now a highly paid spy for the Knights of Malta and ultimately the most powerful organisation on the globe the Catholic Church.

The whole web had fascinated her for years, ever since she had spotted her father in those black robes of the Order one night. She was just eleven and had crept downstairs out of sheer curiosity, she never liked being told to keep away from anything and had often found herself in trouble for it. This particular night, the middle of June and the feast of St. John,

she had been under strict instructions to go to bed early and to sleep. It was like a red rag to a bull and after only half an hour she was peering through the railings on the stairs at her father being dressed in the now familiar black robe of the Knights of Malta. The white Maltese cross against the stark black had mesmerised her and her father's new wife had looked stunning in the equally black, but silky robe with the same white cross. She had watched for several minutes as her step mother eased out the creases and fixed a red bow to the left chest of her robe, from which dangled a shiny Maltese cross.

Her father meanwhile had opened a large but portable wooden chest and taken out a beautifully ornate red neck decoration that she later found to carry the jewel and star of the Knight of the Grand Cross. They were both

living a separate life as Knight and Dame of the Sovereign Order of the Knights of Malta and in that moment her entire life changed.

Nina had always assumed her fathers job as the CEO of a major publishing company in Washington DC and owner of the New York Herald had been his entire life, she had never suspected anything like this. In fact at that tender age she had not known what to make of it. Her parents hadn't spotted her that night and she was left alone, without brother or sister, to share this remarkable secret with. And so she created all kinds of romantic tales for her new discovery. Her mother and father were some kind of mysterious knights of old, the kind she had seen in the movies and spotted in the ornate stained glass windows of the chapel at her Catholic school in downtown Boston. The nuns and priests who were to be her teachers for the next few years simply fostered these notions with their tales of the brave Catholic heroes from history. And so her notions of chivalry and what was right and wrong were forged upon the Roman altar of Jesus and Mary and she had been determined from a very early age to follow in her parents footsteps.

Eventually upon leaving school and then St. Hilda's college for girls she was sent to Rome to work as a liaison officer for

the Order itself and her parents had proudly seen her off at JFK. After a couple of exciting years soaking up the atmosphere of the Italian lifestyle and dealing adeptly with the press her masters noticed her skills and she was accepted as secretary to the Grand Master Villaret himself. The job had been wonderful and brought many privileges. Her parents had been incredibly proud and came to Rome for a couple of weeks to celebrate and meet his Excellency himself. After that and a few months taking dictation, organising meals and trips abroad she began to discover that there was more to the Order than met the eye. But by now she was so deeply involved in the whole romantic vision that the concept of right and wrong had blurred out of all focus. Villaret found in his new secretary somebody he could trust and he started finding her new jobs to do that he would not otherwise have trusted to such a person.

Then, following a particularly late meeting one night they had eaten in Villaret's private apartment in the Vatican and found themselves in his four-

posted bed. She was consumed with love for this man; he was her ultimate hero, her ultimate man.

He was a man ordained by God himself to keep the secrets of the Order and to maintain consistency for the Church. He was a true knight of God in her eyes, no different to the heroes she remembered from her childhood and she loved him no less for this beautiful act of sex.

She stood and walked to the window and looked out at the glistening, deep blue sea and the small limestone fort that was in the grounds of the hotel. She stared at a cat lazing in the warmth of the sun and tried to focus her mind. It was time to take de Villiers into her confidence and hope that he could come up with something.

She dropped her red silk negligée to the floor and walked naked across to the bathroom and showered. For the next twenty minutes she prepared herself to meet de Villiers, the Grand Master's representative on Malta at the Castello dei Baroni in Wardija.

When she finally arrived later that day, following a torrid drive through the heat and madness of the winding Maltese streets she was thirsty and hungry. This was the first time th

she'd ever been to this grand place, with its 17 century castle-like façade and large iron gates. The flag of the Order was slapping in the strong breeze in this northern part of the island. She noted a sign that said weddings and events could be held here and that the Order now only occupied a small area of the castle and thought to herself that should she ever decide to marry then this was the place to do it.

She parked the car on the wide but pock marked street and made her way to the large wooden doors, topped by the baroque heraldry of the ones who built it. Inside she saw the sign for the office of the Grand Master of the Maltese branch and made her way through the empty but refreshingly cool stone interior, up a set of wide stairs and left towards the medieval looking doors at the end of a long corridor. To the right of the door was a bell-pull. Within a few seconds the doors opened and out stepped a little leather-skinned character no taller than her shoulders. She smiled and it was

obvious from the creases and folds of his face that he had spent a lifetime smiling.

"Si?" Came his pleasant response to her call.

"I wish to see Grand Master de Villiers please." She politely requested. "I'm on business from Rome, Dame Lamia's my name if you would please pass that on."

"Si, his Excellency the Grand Master is expecting you." His smile widened and grew as he ushered Nina into the grand apartments.

She followed this little man, noting the dust on his shoes and the bottom of his blue trousers. She also noted that the floor in here was perfectly clean and there had been no sign of that amount of dust outside. Eventually, passing large oak tables with gold candlesticks and tapestry hung walls they arrived at

yet another large solid looking door and the little man knocked and entered. Nina knew her etiquette and remained outside, awaiting the call. She heard a mumbling sound from inside the room and then the smiling man emerged and told her to go in, closing the door and leaving them alone.

The Grand Master of Malta was a grey man, seated behind a large heavy desk, strewn with papers and a green table lamp.

He did not stand but simply nodded towards a tall-backed leather covered chair on her side of the desk. She seated herself and awaited his attention. She noted his yellow fingers and the smoky atmosphere of the room, the burning cigarette in the silver ashtray and the drawn curtains. This was a troubled man.

He looked up from his scribbling and lifted the half-smoked cigarette, drawing it deeply into his deathlike face. His eyes were deep-set into his skull and Nina had to concentrate to see if there were eyes there at all. Ash fell and spread across his scruffy tweed jacket.

"My friend, Villaret said you would be calling. You have anything to tell me?" He coughed and stubbed out the cigarette, immediately pulling a packet of Marlboro from his jacket pocket and lighting another.

"Well, yes." She said furtively, wondering how deep this man was and how much of anything he knew. She had often seen correspondence from him to Villaret, but the words had made little or no sense to her, the language being almost coded. "His Excellency said to remember to be a fish out of water."

"Ha." He coughed again and sat back in his large almost black wooden chair like some medieval king. "Good old Villaret, always the joker. Ha." He inhaled the smoke and blew it out again, filling the room with an almost spiritual manifestation from the other world. A ray of sunlight found its way through a slit in the thick curtains bringing an air of fantasy to the rising and morphing smoke. "So Dame Lamia, you are not of

the pond and you know more than somebody of your tender years should know. Interesting. Have you bedded my old friend?"

She was shocked and embarrassed all at the same time. She felt her cheeks redden as she searched inside for a suitable answer.

"You need not answer," he said, "your face tells all. I am sorry to embarrass you. I am sure it was one of those things we have all done in our time to make the grade. Now, what is it you want? Villaret said you would be visiting, but did not say why."

"Are you aware of the Baptiste man?" She managed to say as she tried to waft the smoke away from her face.

"Si, of course I am aware, it was my fools who killed Presti by mistake and then left Baptiste there." He looked down at his papers and shuffled them.

"I see." She smiled now, realising she had a psychological lever. "It seems that it was also somebody in the Order who sprang him…."

She didn't have time to finish her sentence as de Villiers spat out his cigarette and coughed even louder. "What?" He stood and walked to the

door, placing his ear as close as he could. He listened for a few seconds and then walked to the windows, pressing the heavy curtains as if somebody might be behind them. "Continue, I am sorry. You had better have good reason for saying this." He sat back down and picked up his cigarette.

"The police cameras picked up a green Alpha Romeo as the escape vehicle you see," she began to blurt, trying to get the words out as fast as possible and not extend the tension, "and his Excellency said I should check the images from the police footage of the man seen running with Baptiste and pictures of your members on the island."

"Listen Dame Lamia, do you know how many Alpha Romeo's there are on the island?" He was thinking of ways to sideline the issue, to deal with it himself and not have some young favourite of his old friend uncover something he was trying to sort out himself. He knew there were dissenters in the ranks, he had evidence of that, but he didn't yet know who they were.

He certainly wasn't aware that Villiers was so up to speed on it.

"Yes Excellency." She replied, knowing that the close proximity to Italy meant that there were many Alpha Romeo cars on the streets of Malta. "But seriously, how many green cars are there and how many green cars of that particular model. It is well-known that the Knights of Malta use these particular styled cars and so the police will be asking questions soon, your Excellency."

He sat back again, thinking, staring at the smoke as he tried to work out the best course of action.

"I have one very close aide who will help you." He sat forward and looked at her. She saw his deep dark troubled eyes for the first time and knew he was at least sincere. He picked up his phone and dialled. "Ratto, would you come in please?"

Moments later the little wrinkled man entered the room with a large smile on his face. "Si, Excellency?" He said.

"Dame Lamia needs to know about our cars and our workers here on the island, please help her. And Ratto, this is between us, right?" And with that the Grand Master returned to his mass of papers and ignored them both.

They both left de Villiers in peace. Ratto closed the door gently behind them and motioned Nina back towards the corridor.

"What is it you wish to see?" He said as she followed him.

"Where are the Orders cars?" She was trying to think on her feet.

"Oh, they are all in the compound today." He replied. "We have one day of rest for all the workers every two weeks and today just happens to be that day. Later we have them all cleaned by a local company."

"Great." She said. "Can we go and see them?" He may have been small, but Nina had to occasionally run to keep up with him.

"Si. Follow me." They walked back downstairs and this time turned towards another set of doors in the main reception area. This led outside to a large stone-floored courtyard where nine cars were lined up along the back wall. They were all green Alpha Romeo's and all the same four-door saloon model of the same age. The little snake and cross motifs adorning the trunk glinting in the sunlight.

Nina walked up and down the row of cars, looking inside at the cream leather passenger seats and asking Ratto to open the trunks. He smiled and silently obeyed using a set of keys he had pulled from a hook inside a little garage to the left. They were all fairly clear inside and she could see nothing that sprang out to her as obvious clues. Then she noticed the third car from the left was more dusty than the others. The tyres were almost white with the dirt from some track that was obviously not a normal road. She said nothing about it to Ratto but remembered his shoes and trouser bottoms.

"Do you drive one of these Ratto?" She asked as casually as she could.

Ratto stood with his big smile and his hands in his pockets.

"No. I have a driver, Ritardo. Good man, family man. Simple, but good."

"Oh, I see. But does he have a car?" She pushed a little harder,

hoping, wondering.

"Si." He said, "that one there." And he pointed to the third car from the left. It was a hunch and the only lead she had apart from the picture cross-referencing. She decided that she would follow through and within the hour she had digital images of all the workers under de Villiers Order and a still from the police footage emailed to her at her hotel room.

There was no mistaking it; the man in the footage was Ratto.

Chapter 9

OceanofPDF.com

News

John had spent the whole of the next day alone. He had marched up and down, watched television, tried to turn on one of the computers but had been frustrated by a password request. Eventually he had even taken a drink and sat outside in the sun and observed the little lizards scurrying about all around him. He discovered that they loved fruit and he spent over an hour feeding several small and large, swift-footed lizards with his hands. He was amazed how tame they could be.

The silence had been all encompassing, broken rarely by the tweet of an overhead migrating bird or the distant swish of the sea. He had been sorely tempted to venture down to the water, but remembered what Ratto had said about keeping safe. The time alone and the silence forced him to consider his situation and as the hours ticked by his old self gradually began to return as his strength built. There had been plenty of food and drink left behind and with a freshen up in the bathroom he had worked through his emotions. He was resolved to clear his name, but to escape this island first. He needed to get back to England, he was sure of that. Of course, it also depended on that peculiar little band of men that had sprung him. They may have a different opinion on his future. For some reason they wanted him alive and the thought had puzzled him as to why.

Why would this hardened band of Mafia-like men care so much about him that they put their very lives on the line to save him? It was a puzzle for sure.

The night had come and gone with yet another surrealist dream in the same old place, but this time with the face of the snake man emerging on every character. Their collective voices of "Save me. Save me" had echoed around his mind all night and he had woken sweating and hungry.

He rose, freshened up and dressed. He was now sat at the

camper table drinking a coffee when he heard the distant drone of a car. He shot up and across to the roadside window.

There on the horizon was the familiar plume of dust. He just hoped to God that it was his friendly team.

After a couple of minutes staring anxiously at the oncoming vehicle he was relieved to see that it was a green Alpha Romeo and made for the door. The car pulled up with a skidding, sliding noise across the gravel surface as several lizards shot away like live bullets.

"Morning." Shouted Ratto as he sprang from the car. "How are you? Looking good man." He was followed by Eliphas, Levi and Ritardo as they all motioned John back into the house. John noted how Eliphas and Levi looked all around them wherever they were, like CIA agents.

"Yeah great thanks Ratto." Said John when they were all back inside.

"Good." Ratto motioned Ritardo to get the coffees. "We have a few things we need to talk about. There have been, well, developments."

"Developments?" Said John as he took a boiling hot fresh coffee from the gentle giant.

"Yeah." Ratto slurped his coffee, as if in a hurry. "There's a Dame, a female knight shall we say, she's come from Rome to sort you out Mr Baptiste."

"Right. I see." He said, thinking how this whole thing was getting very big. Rome, that means the Vatican. God.

"Well, anyway, this Dame Lamia…"

"Lamia!" John almost spat out his coffee. "She's a reporter for the New York Herald. She came to see me in hospital." He was shocked, this was getting more and more like a John le

Carre novel every minute.

"Yeah, I know." Said Ratto. "I also think she's on to us too. She came by Castello dei Baroni yesterday and I swear she spotted the dust on our car. Anyway, we've all decided to jump ship and get the hell out before we have more Jesuit henchmen round here than Hitler had in the war."

"All of you?" John was pleased in a way. It meant he had company and a little band of outlaws.

"Yeah." Said Ratto, looking sideways at Eliphas and Levi who grunted approval. "We gotta no choice. But there's more Mr Baptiste, much more. I was over at one of our other little units yesterday with, well, somebody who calls himself a friend. We were fixing up five passports you see. Our Order can issue passports, it's a wonderful tool when you don't want to be monitored around the world see." He sipped some coffee and cleared his throat. "Anyways, we gets a message on the intel, another one of them damned skulls has turned up on Cyprus on a UN archaeological dig. Well, as yesterday was a closed day for our workers, nobody could go, so we are ahead of the game. We need to go and get this skull and anything else that's been found now, before the heavy mob of the Order move in and cover it up."

John was spinning. So he now had a new passport and a new identity, that was great. He also had a band of friends and a mission, that was even better. His world was getting suddenly more exciting. He felt like a child again on an adventure of a lifetime, like this was some kind of fantasy novel and he was living through it. He was the hero with his odd bunch of characters in the heart of a mysterious, exhilarating and often frightening story. But this was all true, it was all happening, it wasn't virtual reality, it was the real thing and the excited, childish buzz inside his mind grew in intensity. He felt born again.

"Brilliant." John blurted and they all immediately turned and

looked at him, followed by a moment's silence and then laughter. It was, it seemed, hilarious and the laughter contagious. When they eventually stopped and sipped their coffees they all fell deathly silent, as there in the background was the subtle drone of a distant car. All hell broke loose as the four experts darted to the windows and doors pulling out side arms as they moved. John too jumped to his feet, feeling fitter and more alert now for the days of convalescence. He ran to the door and Eliphas who was already there turned to him and reached into his pocket. John wondered what was going to happen. Was he going to be clubbed over the head this time?

Or shot? His worries grew to a feat of almost bursting as Eliphas pulled out a small pistol. John's heart almost stopped.

"Here, take a dis." Said Eliphas as he turned and bolted out of the door.

John's heart fluttered and then calmed to a regular stampede.

He held the gun in his hand and had no idea how to use it other than to point and pull the trigger. Holding it firmly in his grasp and doing his best to appear like some kind of SAS hit man he followed Eliphas out of the door, noticing out of the corner of his eye that Ratto was talking to somebody on his mobile phone.

The sun was strong and high over head, beating down on them like a raging torturer. Eliphas took up a position close to the wall of the house and John figured it was to hide his silhouette and followed suit. The car was still a way off, but from the actions of the four outlaws it was pretty obvious nobody was supposed to come down here.

A few moments later Ratto, Ritardo and Levi had taken up positions outside and near the car. From the position of the road it would have been impossible to see them and John thought how blessed he was to be with such professional men.

He crouched and tried hard to remember all those spy films he had seen, mimicking their actions and drawing a wry smile from Ratto.

The dust cloud grew closer and closer and John watched as it rose slowly in the still air. A speck behind and to the side of the cloud drew his attention. It was just a plane or a helicopter.

How he wished he could just flag them down.

"You ok Mr Baptiste?" Ratto almost whispered the words from behind the car.

"Yeah sure." He replied. "Do I just pull the trigger on this?"

John asked Eliphas.

Eliphas quickly and quietly showed John the safety catch and the magazine and for the first time John noticed the name on it, Glock 21. He had no idea what it meant other than probably the manufacturer, and he assumed it to be German or Austrian with a name like that. Either way, it was a beautifully engineered gun and John's inner-child welled with images of himself as James Bond. He had a shining silver car and a tuxedo with a girl on each arm. His mind wandered for a brief second as he saw himself pulling up to the Casino in some sparkling French nighttime venue. He had to bring himself back down to earth and concentrate on the job at hand, and yet it all seemed incredibly surreal to him, as if it were some kind of lucid dream. Things seemed to be moving in slow motion, even a lizard moving across the ground before him appeared to moondance across the arid earth.

He looked up. The car had suddenly got a lot closer and John could feel the tension grow among this strange crew. They could now see the colour of the car at least, blue, and it was pretty small too.

"It's a Fiat." Shouted Ritardo.

"Yeah, it sure is my old friend." Said Ratto. "It's the Dame boys. Lets hope she's following some kinda hunch and that she's on her own."

They were right of course, it was the Dame and she was

heading straight for them. She'd parked near the Castello dei Baroni almost the whole night and waited for the green Alpha Romeo's to begin leaving the compound. When she saw the dusty car, she knew it was Ritardo and Ratto. She had followed them across the island and into Valletta where they had picked up the twin Italian styled studs from just outside the old Grand Masters palace. Then out of Valletta at an incredible speed and she had almost lost them two or three times. But finally, she had watched them turn off the road and so she waited for ten minutes before following them. She had phoned de Villiers and told him she was sure that she knew where Baptiste was and also who the traitors were. He had told her to wait and that he would get help straight down to her. Of course, she didn't listen. She wanted to know for herself what was happening and if she was right after all. Her impatience was a serious flaw and had been noted by other members of the Order.

She finally pulled the car over about thirty feet from the house and left the engine running.

"What's she doing?" Whispered John to Eliphas. There was no reply.

She sat staring at the house for a few minutes and the outlaws remained dead still. The small lizard ran across John's shoe and he almost jumped. It was so silent now that they could hear the distant sea again as they all began to sweat with the stand off. The dust began to settle back down to earth and it was as if the world would continue forever.

Eventually Nina got out of the car. She was wearing tight blue trousers and a white T-shirt with no bra and as she walked her breasts bounced from side to side. Levi let out a short breath as his heart fell for the impossibly beautiful sight before him.

Nobody moved. Then there was the sound of cars again on the distant horizon and Nina turned to see what it was, giving the outlaws a perfect view of her tight ass. They sweated all the more.

They could all now see that behind the Dame's car on the track there was a row of green Alpha Romeo's heading straight for them. It seemed like the game was finally up. There was no way they could get in their own car and pass so many coming in the opposite direction, not on this dirt road. John was worried. What would happen now? Would they all be arrested? Or would this be worse? Would this be a fight to the death?

He heard the clicks of safety catches being turned off and followed suit with his Glock. If it ended here, then he would go down fighting. Strange thoughts ran through John's mind as he imagined dying. Would he fall to the ground like a dead weight? Or would he go out in a blaze of glory like Bonnie and Clyde? He tried to imagine the pain and hoped that he would die fast. He didn't like pain at all and even avoided the dentist at all costs.

The cars eventually reached Nina's blue Fiat and fanned out behind her, blocking any escape and creating a perfect barrier should there be a gunfight. Nina walked to the Alpha's and started talking to the first dark-suited man that emerged, wearing his black sunglasses and staring intently

at the house and car. The cars were full of similar styled workers and John could see why Eliphas and Levi dressed the same way, it was obviously the dress code of the Order, whatever it was these workers did.

It was hot, incredibly hot and the thought of the inevitable gunfight was making John perspire even more. Sweat poured from every part of his body, down his back, his nose and even his palms. Gradually his hands were so wet that the gun slipped from his grasp and fell to the floor, firing as it crunched into the gravel. Then all hell broke loose.

The doors of the cars sprang open and everybody jumped out and started taking up positions behind bonnets, trunks and open doors. Nina too followed suit and dived quickly to safety behind the Order's men. Shots were ringing out all around and

he could see his friends aiming and firing like this was some kind of Mafia war.

John slowly knelt to pick up the gun and as he did so the ground before him erupted in a hail of fire. He quickly grabbed the gun, turned and began firing back through a haze of yellow dust. He had no idea if he was hitting anything, there was mayhem everywhere. It was complete madness.

Then a great whirling sandstorm erupted from the ground and a terrifying noise came from overhead. The shooting ceased as both sides in this battle wondered what the hell was happening.

"Come on." Shouted Ratto as he motioned for the others to follow. A huge white and yellow Bell 429 helicopter was landing behind the house. They ran like hell and dived one at a time into the opened door as the helicopter barely touched the floor. The weight of the downdraft from the rotor blades pushed them back all the time. Shots rang out from behind them as the Order's men desperately tried to stop the helicopter from taking off. Eliphas and Ritardo were the last on and as they jumped aboard they returned fire taking down two of the lead men. The heavy machine lurched into the air as one of the back windows popped and shattered from incoming bullets. As they soared into the air they could hear little bangs and pops as bullets rained on the underside of the helicopter.

Eventually they were too far away for the Order to hit them and they were safe, for the moment anyway. Down below they could see the men scurrying about rushing to get back into their cars and carrying their wounded. The cars set off one by one followed closely by the small blue Fiat.

Everybody knew that this wouldn't be the end of it.

"Thanks Gul." Shouted Ratto through the din of the blades and the roar of the motor.

"No problem, Ratto. We have to get away now, you know

that." He shouted back. Gul was an average looking guy dressed in his flight suit and helmet. His deep brown tan revealing his affection for the outdoors and the gold Rotary watch an indication of his love for the finer things in life. John couldn't help but wonder just how many outlaws the Order really had and whether this extended worldwide.

"Yeah." Replied Ratto, "I know, get to a harbour."

"That's where I'm heading."

Within ten minutes the helicopter was struggling to maintain height, bouncing around like a rubber ball. It seemed one or more of the bullets had broken a fuel line somewhere. Gul was struggling to bring it under control as the others braced for impact.

They came down hard, bounced and then hit again as the lurching machine span around a little and then finally came to an abrupt halt. For a moment there was total silence. Then clouds of debris fell from the sky, dirt, rocks and scraps of rotor blades banging and crashing down to earth. Then it was all over and silence descended once again. Inside John heard the others moan and groan as they brought themselves back into the world. Slowly they all began to realise the extent of the crash.

They were all bleeding from somewhere. John's head wound had re-opened a little and the thick dark red blood oozed slowly down his neck and back.

Eliphas had a gash in his cheek from flying glass; Ratto a cut on his hand, but a smile on his face; Ritardo had banged his head on the ceiling and opened a wound on his forehead and Levi was sporting a couple of fine looking cuts on his legs through the now ripped trousers. Gul on the other hand was nowhere to be seen. Even his pilot's seat had gone.

They all fell out of the smoking wreck that had been a brand new helicopter just moments before. Looking around there

was nothing for miles but desolate grey mute rocks one way and the sea the other. In fact they had stopped at the very edge of precipice.

"Gul!" Shouted Ratto, concern now invading his face and creating lines on his skin where there had been nothing before.

Then they saw the pilot's seat where they had first landed and a few pieces of wreckage. They all ran towards the spot. Gul was lying on the floor. There was no hope that he survived the crash, his body was in several parts.

"Must have been pulled out when we landed." Said Ratto, holding his mouth as if he were holding back a burst dam.

"Let's get the hell out of here. There are boats down there." He pointed down towards the gentle blue sea and their focus thankfully changed. But as John moved he couldn't help wondering whether Gul had a family somewhere that would now miss him and how guilty he felt for starting this whole thing. If only he had stayed in Canada and taught boring history to bored students.

They ran like hell past the stricken helicopter and down a narrow path that led to a natural harbour. They could see several fishing boats and a large yacht bobbing up and down on the blue sea and several locals staring up at them, the noise of the crash obviously drawing their attention.

Once at the bottom they all followed Ratto as he headed straight across the stony beach for the boats. Once there they found a small wooden jetty leading towards a large brown and white yacht called Liberta. They dived on board and Ratto told John to go below.

Within minutes they were underway and all John could hear from the belly of the boat was shouting, the movement of the band of outlaws above and the droning of an outboard engine.

Moments later Ratto joined John.

"We will be OK now, trust me." He didn't look too sure, his smile now a vague memory. "We will slip out to sea and join the many other boats sailing in the Mediterranean." He sat down beside John on the thin bench that skirted the edge of the communal room.

"Whose boat is this?" Asked John, holding the back of his head.

"It was Gul's. He was heading this way when we came down."

Ratto looked sad at the loss of his friend. "He was a good man.

Owned several hotels on the island and knew of our cause. We have been friends a long time."

"Where will we go now?" John asked, war weary and bruised.

"Cyprus." Came the response.

Chapter 10

OceanofPDF.com

New Evidence

"Get them. Do you hear?" Shouted Urban, his rage overcoming him. "I don't care who you have to kill or what you have to do, but get them and finish this."

He was pacing up and down like some mad dictator wearing out the rich carpet in his private apartment overlooking St.

Peter's. It was dark and the lights below gave an impression of calm at the Vatican. Inside all hell was breaking loose. Aides and members of the various Orders were scurrying about organising search parties and hit teams. Meetings were being held amongst the top people from the Orders of Knights, the Mafia and Jesuits. They were pooling their resources like never before. It was now known whom the culprits were and what they were trying to do. It seemed that it had been this dissident team who had lured John Baptiste into the whole affair and that explained the note around the dead mans neck.

The police reports had puzzled everyone and now this Brotherhood of the Snake had shown themselves. It was they who had passed the information of the skull to Oxford, hoping to bring an expert into the field. It was they who had written back to John Baptiste with permission to see the skull. Mattia Presti had been a loyal supporter of the Order and so de Villiers and others had been confused right from the start at this sudden turnaround in his actions. The Brotherhood of the Snake were playing a game with everybody, including Baptiste. The question now was how to stop them and to silence this academic on the loose.

Decisions were made and orders given. A contingent of special Vatican forces were sent immediately down to Malta to assist Dame Lamia and de Villiers was taken off the case, his lack of discipline and knowledge of his own people a severe disappointment. The biggest worry now was just how deep this problem went; how far was the reach of this Brotherhood? Did they even have people in the Vatican?

What would be their next move? And how could this be kept from the press? The historians found traces of the Brotherhood in some medieval texts and it seemed they had already had links with the infamous Knights Templar.

According to these manuscripts, hidden for decades in the th

vaults, this was why a previous Pope in the 14 century had eradicated the Templars from existence. He obviously hadn't done a good enough job.

Then one of the departments with ties in the Greek Orthodox Church heard that a find had been made on Cyprus similar to the one from Malta and so the intelligence people were ordered to deal with this situation at the UN, who were running the archaeological dig there. Dame Lamia and her new backup force were ordered to Cyprus to retrieve the artefacts and to wait for Baptiste and the Brotherhood to turn up.

Several days later a white and brown yacht was pulling into Paphos harbour in Cyprus, with five tanned and hungry men on board. All they had eaten for days were baked beans and the occasional foul tasting fish Ritardo had managed to fish from the sea. There had been plenty of bottled water and even some tea and coffee, but the plain diet was taking its toll.

On route Eliphas had found some paint and removed the name Liberta from the hull and replaced it with Benhu Bird in the hope that they might avoid any search for Gul's yacht. There had been a lot of low flying police and military planes on their journey, but it seemed they had avoided detection so far. And so, with a new hope in their hearts they had all changed into the various clothes they had found in the master bedroom and freshened up, casually going about the business of five holiday makers out for some fun.

Ratto had radioed in to the port authorities and had found no problem in getting permission to dock. He had assumed their new identities were paying off. On the journey Ratto had

explained to John that the Order could issue its own passports and so all five of them had new ones made under different identities, just in case things went bad. One of the guys at the passport unit was a relative of

Ratto's and well the rest was history. In fact, it seemed the four helpers already had a number of passports they could use, but most of them were known to the Order. It also became apparent that Gul had quite a few registration documents for the yacht under various names and so they chose an Egyptian one and renamed it.

The harbour was only half full and so they found a docking without any problem. Ritardo and Ratto jumped ashore to see the authorities and were back within minutes.

"Relax." Said Ratto. "They were too busy playing cards."

They all grabbed their things and jumped ashore. The sun blazed down like it was the end of the world and the shimmering heat gave motion to the otherwise still palm trees. The old stone fort at the end of the beautiful harbour was covered in scaffolding and seating for the open-air opera that graced the setting every year. A long row of restaurants fronting the gently rocking boats called to their cravings and so they headed for one right in the middle called The Pelican.

Taking seats in the shade they ordered pasta and beer and angled their chairs to view the scenery and watch for the enemy. At the entrance to the restaurant one of the waiters fed small fish to the chained pelican pet, an obvious gimmick for the tourists. It was still early in the day and so there weren't too many holidaymakers around, but the occasional scantily clad, white skinned ladies certainly drew their eyes. But then so too did the group of six or seven Italian looking men taking an interest in their yacht. One of them lifted a mobile phone to his ear and with that Ratto reached gently into his home made bag and pulled out a small black pistol, slipping it unseen into his trouser pocket.

"We should go, but we need to go a little at a time." He said to

the others. "They will be looking for five men now. Ritardo, you and the twins go now, to that car park over there, see? Me and Baptiste will follow soon."

The three men stood and paid the waiter, took their food in a white plastic bag and made for the car park at the town end of the harbour. They weren't noticed. A few moments later Ratto and John stood and casually strolled along past the restaurants and slipped into the car park where they rejoined the others.

"God that was close." Said John.

"Yeah, but a that'sa close a." Replied Eliphas, pointing behind them to a large blue and white sign that read "UN

Archaeological Unit, Cyprus, Roman/Greek Dept."

"Wow." Said Ratto, "Couldn't be better! Is it open?"

Now they were out of sight of the mysterious men, they walked together towards a large brick built arched entrance to what appeared to be a wide open dust bowl. For as far as they could see, both out to sea and right past the car park, there was nothing but stones and dirt, occasionally dotted by a single or double standing ancient column. John heard a couple of clicks, as he knew safety catches were being moved and so he too reached into his bag and pulled out his now familiar pistol.

Whilst on the boat the others had shown him how to clean it, reload it and he even had some target practice with passing seagulls. They had spent much of the boring sea voyage preparing for the eventualities that would arise and this had included devising five small black bags to hold a bottle of water, some sugar sweats, spare magazines, a gun and passports. Of course, Ratto knew now that these new passports would be utterly useless because, like a fool, he had left all the old ones on the yacht. Those men would now have boarded the boat and rifled their way through all the available evidence, which included the passenger list created for the docking papers. He silently collected the false passports from his friends as they stood by the large wire fence and scanned

the horizon, then he walked solemnly to a nearby trash can and threw them away. Everybody understood. Over the past few days at sea they had built an amazing spirit of friendship and over long conversations had shared their

lives with John and John had shared his tales with them. Ritardo had told him of his childhood when he had been beaten so hard at his Catholic boarding school near Venice that his mind had never worked the same since. He hadn't spoken for over six years.

"Well, shall we go in." Said Ratto, breaking John's thoughts with a wide, comforting smile. "Come on, don't look so glum."

It was of course easy for him to say. He always had that smile and he always managed to see the bright side of anything.

Ritardo just followed and was neither happy, nor sad; he just did as he was told because he was told. Eliphas and Levi had been trained not to reveal emotions and were always too busy searching and scouring for threats with one hand almost permanently on their triggers. John on the other hand was thoughtful and engrossed. He had overcome many of his fears. His life had been taken away from him so many times now that he no longer cared. But what he did feel was excitement and Ratto had many times on the boat told him to keep this excitement under control. He told John how emotions could affect judgement and how it needed to be balanced with thought, logic and knowledge and so John was now attempting to think through their next moves.

"Come on John, this way." They walked up to the brick archway entrance and Ritardo reached into his trouser pocket to pay the capped official looking man seated on little wooden bench.

"No pay. Free today." Said the friendly character pointing to a sign that stated Sunday's were free for municipal museum sites.

"Grazzi." Said Ratto and they all wandered onto the site.

"So John," said Ratto, "where do we go to find this evidence?"

John scratched his head and looked around as they walked.

He wanted to give an answer, to be part of this crack unit and to be worth his salt, but he was struggling. All he could see were rocks and occasional

bumps in the ground. He had worked out on the boat that this little group all had their own skills that complimented each other. Ratto was a brilliant con man, able to manipulate almost any situation and to convince the Arabs to buy sand. Ritardo was the big bruiser, able to pull down a building with his bare hands. Eliphas and Levi were expert marksmen but Eliphas was great at explosives, whilst Levi excelled at communications. None of them were skilled in history, archaeology or anthropology it was something that never cropped up in their work. What they did all understand in union, was their hatred for the Catholic Church and the protection of the ultimate secret a secret that John, no matter how hard he had tried, simply could not get to the bottom of. Ratto had just kept telling him that he would soon find out or that the truth must be found and they finally after all these years now had the chance to uncover the truth. He explained that the truth was so shocking it would bring down some of the most powerful organisations on the planet, especially the Church. This had frustrated John, but it had also sparked a curiosity in him that he had not known for a very long time. His mind had raced at the possibilities and stopped him from sleeping. All manner of peculiar notions ran through his mind like herds of Wilderbeasts. But he just couldn't understand why an elongated skull would figure, unless it represented some kind of pre-Christian deity, formed to manifest outwardly in the human, that which was worshipped within.

They walked a little further up a slight incline and then to the right John spotted a large white tent-like structure.

"There." He said with unfounded confidence.

"Quickly." Came the swift and subtle tones of Levi as he

tapped Ratto on the shoulder and nodded behind them. There at the archway, now no more than an inch high in their vision, was a movement of several dark characters.

"Is it them?" Asked Ratto, as he took the pace a little higher and sweat broke out on his brow.

"Si." Said Levi. Everybody knew that Levi and his brother had excellent eyesight. Their old uncle used to say they could spot an ant on a football

field from space and so he had packed them off like little urchins to the special school in Sicily where they were to learn their trade. In the Second World War, Vatican men had shot both their parents whilst on the run from the US Army. It turned out they had been in the Brotherhood of the Snake and were trying to get to Rome with some vital information. The Jesuits had caught them and taken the information. Many more died later. The twins were given new names by their mother's brother and only informed of their sorrowful fate once they had graduated from their Mafia schooling and joined the Order. Now they had been perfect insiders.

"Then we must hurry." Ratto urged them all on.

They started to run and John stumbled as he looked behind him and down the slope towards the grey movements. He quickly straightened and caught up with the other guys, noticing that they were now being followed. Eventually they reached the white open sided tent and went straight in. It was about the size of a tennis court and inside there was a deep trench, leading into black. There was the top of an aluminium ladder sticking up and without a word Ratto, Ritardo and John started to descend one at a time with Levi and Eliphas remaining above to guard their rear.

"Hurry friends." Shouted Levi. "We only have minutes before they get here." Levi and Eliphas fell to the ground with pistols in hand and scoured the area intently. John's heart raced and his head pounded.

The ladders seemed to go on forever and a few times John slipped and hit Ratto on the head to audible grumbling.

Finally they reached the bottom. The heat had grown more and more humid as they descended into this hellish black hole.

"There's a light here." Ritardo was groping around in the darkness and stumbled upon a portable gas lamp. Within seconds the pit was illuminated and the immediate scene was an assortment of rocks and rubble with a dim white light from above. Then gradually their eyes became accustomed to the Victorian glow of the gas lamp and they all saw it.

A large grey rectangular sarcophagus stood like an ancient altar in the centre of what was obviously a tomb of some kind.

The walls were adorned with spirals, concentric rings and there were images of snakes everywhere on T shaped crosses.

There was also a terrible acid smell that seemed to eat away at the nostrils. They didn't speak a word and walked towards the open topped stone coffin. It could easily have taken two or three full sized men and was deep enough to drown a cow in.

They crunched across the rubble floor and Ritardo lifted the lamp for them all to see. The stench grew as they closed in.

It was empty but for a few strands of cream and brown cloth and what looked like slithers of fresh flesh.

"What the fuck is that?" Said Ratto as he held his nose and peered closer.

"The remains of whatever was in here." John replied, deep in thought. "Whatever they found, it was still as fresh as the day it died. Something's not right here, something's very wrong."

"Question is, where is it now?" Ratto stood back from the coffin, unable to cope with the smell anymore. John leaned in to try and reach the remains, hoping there would be some clue.

"More light." He was breathing heavy as he heaved his torso over the edge of the damaged sides putting pressure on his stomach. Whoever had removed the lid had done so carelessly. He leaned forward, almost falling in and pulled on the strands of cloth, trying to shake off the deep red rotting flesh that clung to it like a limpet.

"Ratto, Ratto." A voice rang out from above. It was Eliphas.

"They're coming Ratto, we need to go now or there'll be a gunfight."

"OK. There's nothing here." Shouted Ratto back, only too happy to be getting out of the awful smell.

"Wait!" John shouted. "Ritardo, the lamp, quick." He was edging his way past the sarcophagus and further into the dark at the back of the room. Ritardo followed dutifully.

"John, we have to go, quickly." Ratto exclaimed. Looking at the ladder and then back again at John torn between the two.

"No, there's another way. Tell Eliphas and Levi to come down."

"What? Are you mad? We'll be stuck."

"No, we won't. Come on. Just do it." John was now sure of himself. He had put the shreds of cloth in his pocket for later analysis and had suddenly felt a draft coming from the back of the dark room and it was this subtle breath of air that he was now following. "There's air coming down here, look, it's a corridor leading off." He had Ritardo lower the lamp; there were scratch marks on the floor. The archaeologists had obviously dug down from the top, but had found another way out.

"Come on Eliphas, Levi, down here." Shouted Ratto as he stood at the foot of the ladder and couldn't believe his own words.

"What?" Came the response.

"Just come on."

Moments later all five were slowly siding their way past rubble and fallen masonry, following the light breeze that came from somewhere in the darkness. Ratto had kicked the ladders over to give them more time.

"I hope you're right about this Baptiste." Ratto said as he quickly laid a trip wire across the darkened room and Eliphas set up the little green cube shaped explosives. "That oughta hold em."

They squeezed through the dark passage that led away from the crypt. The walls were dry and crumbling as they scraped by with unseen piles of rubble on the floor making the route troublesome. It veered off to the right and began to ascend, the gentle breeze like a breath of fresh air blowing the

acrid smell away. Before them the ceiling lowered and they had to almost crawl to continue. John's heart began to beat harder as the claustrophobia of the situation took hold. Then a large bang came from behind them and screaming. Dust shot up the passageway and darkened the already dimming gaslight.

Shouts of pain and fear were cascading upon them and they all felt a slight hint of shame but also relief.

Eventually the dust began to settle and they noticed before them as they were dragging themselves beneath a large fallen stone that a feint light shone at the end of the passage.

"There, look." Said Ratto, pointing towards the light. "That must be the way out. I will go first and see."

They stumbled towards the light and once there they noticed it was but a simple whole in the ground barely large enough to get a man through. Ratto pushed his head up like a mole emerging in the night. The light was blinding and the heat overbearing. His legs dangled and Ritardo gave him a heave

to clear the hole.

"Wait there a minute." He popped his head back through the hole. "There's nobody around, I'm going to take a quick look."

They waited in the hot, sticky tunnel, with dust on every inch of their clothes and skin. Sweat ran down their foreheads making a clean line through the grime. They could still hear the moaning of men in the crypt behind them and silently contemplated. John wondered if this was all worth the life or injury of another? Why not just leave this stupid religion to its stupid secrets? What harm could come from it after all? It was something from the past, better left alone. But then his thoughts turned to how he himself had been treated at the hands of these people and he wondered how many more would have to suffer for the manipulations of a controlling power. Why should they write their own history? Why shouldn't the people of the world know the truth? In fact, why shouldn't he? He still didn't know

the full extent of this mess he had fallen in to and he decided it was time to find out.

"What is this really all about Eliphas?" He looked towards the once proud Italian stud, who was the closest to him.

"What?"

"Why is this all so serious? I mean, its just a few skulls and things from some long lost ancient people isn't it?" He took out his bottle of water and handed it to Eliphas, trying to engender some kind of response.

"There's a more to a dis than I can say leettle one." Eliphas drank some water and handed it back, hoping desperately to avoid John's questions. "You weel find a out soon."

"No." John was getting angry now. He had been told he would find out soon enough for the last time. "No. I want to know, what's so serious Eliphas, that we have to blow people up and race across the world looking for these damn skulls."

"It's a more dan thees skulls Mr Baptiste." Eliphas was sweating more and looking vainly to the others for help.

"Thees skulls are signs to a greater secret. Something we only a know from a our tales and traditions."

"And." John pressed. "I refuse to go any further until I know."

And with that he folded his arms and sat down.

Eliphas looked up at the ceiling and suddenly decided to tell John what he knew.

It turned out that they were members of a secret society that had been in existence for thousands of years. They had, so the story went, been created to protect a special priesthood in ancient times who knew how to talk to God. Then the Christians had come along and tried to wipe them out, calling them serpent worshippers and turning the snake into an image of the

devil. The society had gone underground and been persecuted and hounded for centuries but it had managed to infiltrate the Church and now had members across the world searching for the remnant. John had looked puzzled at this and asked what this remnant was. It turned out that the final members of the serpent priests had been taken away captive by the leaders of the new found Catholic Church and it was the societies role to find them and free them. This had been their role for hundreds of years and over that time this history had become just another folklore to many who now just fought against the oppression of the Church and the subtle power politics. Eliphas explained that there was still a hard line core who believed in the old tales and wanted to find the truth about their ancestors downfall and that John was now with that hardcore element. However, there was more. It turned out that there were tales and myths of a man who would one day come when the planets aligned and who would have the power of the ancient priests and he would find the truth and save the remnant. For over three hundred years the society had waited for this man who would have many sorrows and be of the line of the Baptist. At that last word John's head had started spinning. His own family name had

been chosen in the eighteenth century because of some vague family tradition that they were of the bloodline of John the Baptist. Each first born son had been named John ever since.

"You think I am that man?" John was getting agitated at the stupidity of it all.

"Si. There a ees no doubt Mr Baptiste." Eliphas cringed at the statement himself and knew that John must surely be doubting his tale.

"Bloody stupid. The remnant would all be dead by now anyway." John was angry; he was playing a part in a ridiculous boys club game. "I am going to hand myself in the moment I get back up top."

Eliphas turned to John and pressed his shoulders to the wall.

"Leesten to me Mr Baptiste." He stared at John intently. "Do you a dream? Do you dream of strange theengs Mr Baptiste?"

John stared back and then lowered his gaze, thinking of his recurrent nightmares. Dreams of madness he had experienced for three years. "Yes, but we all dream."

"Do you dream of snakes? Who ees it you must a save Mr Baptiste?"

John's heart stopped. How did Eliphas know about the message in his dream? "I don't know Eliphas, I don't know."

His heart pumped.

"You must a save the remnant Mr Baptiste. It ees your destiny, your birthright."

Chapter 11

OceanofPDF.com

Nemesis

It was night now. Somehow John and the others had managed to escape the UN grounds at Paphos unseen. They had emerged from the hole in the ground and noticed that it was from a large Roman stylised head of a snake. Using nothing but heavily laundered cash they had found on the yacht, they booked themselves in to two different hotels under pseudonyms.

John stood on the balcony of his room and smoked. The sun had gone and left behind a refreshingly cool dark blue scene.

The sea gently rocked backwards and forwards accompanied by the constant background noise of thousands of crickets.

The palm trees were still and wrapped in chains of white lights, looking like Mediterranean Christmas Trees. Couples walked arm in arm, talking and laughing. If he closed his eyes he could imagine himself back in Malta with his wife. She used to say to him in her warm loving voice, "you should laugh more John, it's the music of the soul." His soul hadn't felt like singing for quite a while now.

He stood and listened to the insects, drank a beer and lit another cigarette. The words of Eliphas had disturbed him and he no longer wished to sleep. There was something strange about all this and unless he figured it out, well, he didn't know, but he might go mad. Of course, he might already be mad and all of this part of his delusional state.

His thoughts were suddenly broken by a knock on the door. It must be Ratto; the others were in the hotel Sol across the street.

"Just a minute." He shouted as he walked to the door, putting his drink on the glass table and stubbing out his cigarette on the way. He unhooked the safety latch without even looking through the spy hole and opened the door.

There before him was that New York reporter, Nina Lamia.

He was shocked and before he had chance to close the door she had walked past him and into the room. A little stunned and trying desperately to think what to do he closed the door and turned to her, tensing his muscles as if ready for a fight.

"How did you find me?" He said, stalling while his brain got into gear.

"It wasn't difficult." She said as she sat down on the bed, a psychological trick to lure John into a false sense of security.

"There are only a few hotels, and they all have computer booking systems. Mr Pope stuck out. Is that your new name then John?" She smiled and leaned back a little on the bed in a very cat-like sensual manner.

"Whatever." He edged towards the glass table and picked up his drink. "You're with them aren't you?" He gulped his beer.

"Who?" She smiled. "You mean the Order? No, they just found you at that little house at the same time as me. I was hoping you would be able to tell me what this was really all about Mr Babtiste. John."

John felt a little easier for some reason. Maybe she was telling the truth, it was possible. "Look Miss Lamia, I have no idea what it's all about really, honest. Its all mad if you ask me."

She kicked her black heeled shoes off and shuffled up the bed, pulling her legs under her arms and placing her chin on her knees. John could see more than he had seen of a woman for a long time. The silky black stocking tops ended where the white flesh began and the lacy knickers screamed at him to stare. Maybe it was the beer or the atmosphere of the place but he was certainly moving in places he hadn't for a long time.

"Oh really?" She parted her legs slightly and smoothed out a crease in the short grey skirt. "Well, we are in a mess either way aren't we John? What are you going to do next? And

where are your friends now?" She ran her hand through her hair and smiled at him.

"They're around." He said as he walked to the mini bar and offered her a drink.

"I don't need a drink John." She said. "But I am tired. I don't have a room because I've just arrived. I heard there was some explosion here and so I flew straight in, it was my only lead.

Any chance I can stay here with you for tonight?" She looked at him with her dark doe eyes and smiled. For some unknown reason he couldn't refuse.

Minutes later she was in the shower and he was back on the balcony smoking and drinking. There were fewer people on the promenade below now as silence invaded the land and lights began to go out up and down the front. Paphos was falling asleep.

John went back inside and closed the double doors and curtains. He turned and there before him with a towel around her head was the naked figure of Nina Lamia. She was a picture of perfection and her smile was warmer than the Mediterranean sun. She had one foot on the bed and was rubbing white cream slowly into her beautiful smooth skin.

John diverted his eyes almost immediately, the image captured for posterity.

"Its OK John, you can look." She said, swapping legs. "I don't mind you watching, it turns me on."

John's heart raced and he felt sure he would feint any moment.

He closed his eyes and desperately wanted his mind to tell him what to do. Thoughts of his wife and his loss attacked his biological urges, but they began to fade. The memory of his wife for some strange reason began to lose the battle and all he could think of was this young sexy woman that stood naked in his room offering herself on a plate. Before he had chance to decide and open his eyes he felt a brushing against his groin.

He opened his eyes and there she was. She pulled the towel from her hair and threw it on the floor, while one hand slowly and rhythmically caressed him. He was fixated, stuck to the spot. He held his breath with anticipation

and then could no longer hold himself back. It had been too long and she was just too damn gorgeous. He wrapped his arms around her warm steaming fresh body as she pulled at his belt and undressed him like a pro.

Moments later they were writhing like entwined snakes on the bed and then it was all over. John couldn't help himself.

She said she didn't mind and John drifted off to sleep lying naked on the bed, a happy man.

John was suddenly brought back to consciousness with a slap to the face. It was Ratto glaring at him from above.

"John, wake up." Ratto hit him again.

"Ok, ok, I'm awake." He rubbed his eyes and then remembered what he had done. He looked to his side and there unconscious and tied in ripped bed linen was Nina.

"What have you done to her?" He asked as he stood and dressed.

"It's not what I've done John is it?" Ratto smiled at him and helped him gather his things. "We have to leave now. Never good to stay until the morning light in one place." Ratto knew his trade well and had obviously come to wake John when he found them both asleep on the bed.

"Is she dead?" John asked as he stood at the door and looked back.

"No, she is just going to sleep for a few days to give us time to get the hell out of here."

They closed the door behind them and joined the others waiting in the corridor. Outside Eliphas broke into an orange Jeep and they drove out of Paphos and headed for the mountains. The sun was slowly rising and the cool morning air was quickly warming. The friends were silent, all of them dealing with the whole situation in their own ways.

John sat in the back and tried to throw off the feelings of guilt for what he had done the night before. It seemed no matter how many years it had been

since the death of his wife, he just couldn't come to terms with making love with another woman. He tried to focus on something else entirely and pulled out the strips of cloth and flesh he had recovered from the sarcophagus. It stank vile and the blood had turned black.

He pulled the strands apart and looked closely at the flesh.

Then he noticed something strange. Sticking out of the blackness was a small oval shaped disk as hard as glass. John pulled at it gently and freed it from the fleshy grasp. It had a strange green tint that seemed to change colour as he tilted it in the sun. He licked his fingers and cleaned it off. He couldn't believe his eyes. It was a scale, a small quite fresh scale. What on earth had been in that tomb? His mind raced and then his archaeological training kicked in and he excused it away as some kind of peculiar snake-like jewellery of the serpent priest that had obviously been buried in there. But one thing he just couldn't get his mind around was how a Roman tomb had kept the body in such obviously good condition. And then there was the size. It just wasn't normal to build a sarcophagus that big.

He kept his thoughts to himself and thrust the remains back into his bag. The green pine trees of the hills were filling the air with a sweet smell and his concerns seemed a million miles away. The roads were empty and his tempter was fast asleep. Had she really just been a reporter or were his friends right and she was really a Dame, a female knight of the Order?

Frankly his loins hadn't cared and he had thoroughly enjoyed himself. And yet he also felt remorse and shame. It was as if his wife wasn't dead at all and that she was even now waiting

somewhere for him to return. He assumed the dreams were keeping her alive in his mind and stopping him from moving on. Would he never be able to live his own life?

"Close thing last night with the lady." Stated Ratto, who could see John's deep thoughts and tried to bring him out.

John knew Ratto wanted to know why. "It just happened Ratto. I had drunk too much and she was so tempting." He looked at Ratto and his big

knowing smile. "Question is, why did she tempt me?"

"The prophecy." Eliphas said from the passenger seat in the front.

"Hush, Eliphas." Ratto slapped him across the back of the head.

"No Ratto, I deserve to know." John held his friend by the shoulder. "Are you going to tell me that all of this has been in some kind of weird prophecy?"

Ratto rolled his eyes in the air and hit Eliphas again. "Big mouth."

"Well yes and no. Pull over Ritardo." Ratto pointed to a little roadside café that was just opening up. The squat elderly woman was placing plastic chairs on the dusty roadside as she kicked a stray dog, yelling something quite incomprehensible as she did so. "We will have a coffee and wake ourselves up eh!"

They pulled alongside the dirty little eatery and jumped out, almost giving the old lady a heart attack. Ordering coffees they sat at a white round plastic table closest to the Jeep and gave John an explanation.

Ratto explained that as the Christian Church was in its early years a subtle undercurrent movement had emerged

alongside it. To the outside world this was seen as the Gnostic Church and there were all-manner of pagan groups integrated bringing with them their wisdom knowledge and literature.

They developed a secondary set of Gospels that never found their way into the official set of texts now known as the Bible and some of them had been re-discovered in the last century.

This group had never died out and had passed on its knowledge from father to son, mother to daughter. They held to the belief that Christianity as it stood today took the whole Jesus myth far too literally and that true wisdom was within each and every person. The whole concept of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, being married was in fact based upon a Gnostic tradition that

the two opposites within each person need to be united. Ratto explained that their belief was in the male and female principles of balance and that everybody could find this balance once they had found themselves. He pointed out that the psychoanalyst Carl Jung had in fact uncovered these concepts and given the world his Jungian psychology, which in fact was based upon ancient beliefs. But Ratto also explained the reason for this that Carl Jung had been an initiate in the Brotherhood of the Snake, in the same way that Isaac Newton, Leonardo da Vinci and even Alfred Einstein had been.

In fact Ratto explained that there had been a great many infamous initiates throughout time and that this had been a constant battle for balance in the world, between true inner wisdom and the lies of the Church. At the centre of this underground stream had been a prophecy, written thousands of years ago by the priests of Egypt. Theses priests had also been underground in the world of ancient Egypt and had in fact struggled against the same oppression that the Brotherhood today struggled under. Occasionally the battle had swung in favour of the Brotherhood, such as when Akhenaton, a pharaoh and brother had pushed back the power of the orthodoxy and released the true wisdom upon the people. Unfortunately the people had not been ready and the battle lost, wiping Akhenaton from the face of history and re-instigating priestly rule. The pharaoh and his brother escaped

from Egypt and made for what is known today as Israel, where they emerged later in tradition as Moses and Aaron, the wielders of the infamous serpentine staff. This staff that turned into a snake was in fact a literary device to reveal the true origins and wisdom of Moses and Aaron that they were brothers of the Snake.

Through time the secret teachings of these early brethren emerged from within the Jewish people as the Kabbalah and from India with the Naga serpent race. In Greece they can be found in the stories of Plato and in Europe with the Druids. In each case the wisdom teachings can be aligned to the same core origins, but they can also be aligned to the same core secret of the serpent. But there was more. It seemed that the Egyptian brotherhood had worked out a grand plan for the future and created a lineage that would one day bring balance back into the world and free the

remnant. The secret of the remnant had long since been forgotten, even within the Brotherhood, but they knew that whatever it meant, there would be a time like no other. The prophecy, learned by every member of the Order spoke of a line of John the Baptist and this was the reason that John was so revered by secretive Orders such as the Knights Templar. The traditions and sacred rituals of these seemingly separate groups all revolved around the lineage of John.

Eventually the Brotherhood of the Snake evolved two distinct groups, the priests and the warriors. The priests were to maintain the wisdom literature and watch for the signs of the prophecy and the warriors were to protect the lineage, ready for the day of release. Ratto explained that he and his three friends were warriors of the Brotherhood of the Snake and they had been sent, as the best men, to protect John and to find the remnant.

John remained silent the whole time and considered the words, thinking the whole thing through. Ratto and his motley crew had done nothing to harm John. They had protected him and they seemed pretty real to him. He thought

back to his own childhood. No matter how hard he tried he could think of nothing special about his father or mother and at no time did anything unusual about them emerge. But one thing was sure, they had lead a remarkably safe life. And then he remembered one time when he was nearly eighteen. He had been running to college in his sleepy Canadian Toronto suburb, late as usual. He had run out into a wide road and dropped some books. Quickly he had turned and headed back for the books, when a stranger from almost nowhere had pushed him out of the way and picked up his books. He had thought nothing more of it until now, but he did remember the man. A tall well-built man whom he had never seen before that day and never again since. He had worn a dark suit that looked exactly like those worn by the Knights of Malta.

John asked Ratto about the Knights and why there appeared to be two sides within the one Order. It turned out that various warrior Orders had been set up within the very heart of the Catholic Church itself as a perfect hiding place. This of course brought its own problems, not least of which was the

fact that the Church would often place its own people inside the Order and eventually the Masters of the Order became th

nothing but Catholic stooges. And so it seemed that in the 12

century the first smell of this secret Brotherhood had got up the nose of the Church and an internal war had raged. First the th

Cathars in France and then the Templars in the 14 century and from then onwards the dreadful inquisitions. All these and more were at the heart of a war hidden from the eyes of the world at large.

But John wanted to know more about this prophecy and why they believed that he was the final man in the lineage and the saviour of the remnant. All Ratto could say was that his family was the last in the long line that had emerged from Egypt all those years ago. They had journeyed with Moses and Aaron into the so-called Promised Land and from there into Europe and England. The brothers within the Temple Order of the Freemasons had then spirited them away to the America's and finally Canada to escape the Protestant bigotry and religious

battles of the old continent. They had been settled down in Toronto, given land and wealth and protection for the next few centuries. Now John had been sent on a quest that only he could uncover. Now John was the last in the line of the Baptist, for his marriage had bore no sons. In addition to this the Brothers of the priestly Order who worked deep within the Vatican itself had revealed that the planets were aligning as predicted by the ancient prophecy and that the remnant was in serious danger from the new Pope.

It turned out that the alignment of the planets was nothing more than a solar eclipse predicted to happen in no more than three days and visible across Europe.

John sat looking very calm and stared blankly into the white dirt of the dry and dusty Cypriot roadside. His whole world was changing by the minute and he just wasn't sure how much more he could take. Only a few weeks ago he had been an ordinary man in a relatively ordinary and boring job. Sure he had been through his problems in life, who hadn't? But he was

nothing special, was he? However, there was one niggling issue at the back of his mind the dreams. From his own research into dreams and their meanings he had indeed come into contact with the works of Jung and he had found that his own nightmares were nothing archetypal and so he had struggled to place them in any standard boxes. In addition to this, the recurring nature and messages for his own soul were simply often too much for his waking state to deal with. There was little doubt, these dreams were simply not normal and Ratto's new information was making more sense in his subconscious world than his conscious.

Eliphas brought John's thoughts back into focus as he stood and urged them to continue. The twins would get fidgety if they were in one place too long and so they tipped the grumpy old lady and jumped back in the Jeep.

"Where are we heading?" John asked Ratto as Ritardo sped off and they all held on for dear life.

"There are friends in the hills. You will see." And with that they drove mile after endless mile round one bend and then another. It seemed the whole world was suddenly full of twists and turns.

Chapter 12

OceanofPDF.com

The Monastery

It was mid afternoon when Nina finally woke up. Her legs and hands were tightly bound and her mouth taped firmly shut.

She silently cursed herself for letting an anthropologist get the better of her. Her stupid plan had backfired. She had intended to do exactly the same to John and bind him to the bed as she called for backup. Now she was the one looking like a naked trussed up turkey.

She wriggled for ages and finally fell off the bed with a thump. The blood in her veins pulsated, her hands were swollen and she breathed heavily through her nose. Slowly bringing herself to her knees she managed to knock the phone to the floor and dialled with her nose. Finally somebody answered. It was one of the Orders new men from Rome, sent by the new Pope and Nina was at least happy for small blessings. At least he would be smart, she thought to herself as she tapped her head onto the receiver in Morse Code. After six attempts at SOS the voice on the other end said "Yes I get it, you need help. Who are you and where are you?" She tapped a response.

Within thirty minutes two burly men had burst into her room and with huge grins they slowly untied her, taking their time to get a good eye full of the stricken beauty.

"Seen enough?" Nina said as they finally pulled the tape from her mouth. "Filthy little Italians. Now go and get in the car, I'll be there in fifteen minutes. We have to find those bastards quickly."

The sun was now at its pinnacle and yet the beautiful scenery of the Troodos mountains remained cool and green due to the height. The pines trees grew thin and tall and filled the air with a scent of mystery and new life.

They were heading for a remote monastery in the western hills of Cyprus where Ratto explained the brothers maintained a sacred icon that was a

thousand years old and held arcane magic. The monks of Kykkos Monastery, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, had protected the image ever since Emperor Comnenos had given it to them. The icon, known as Elousa, was now protected and encased in silver, tortoiseshell and mother-of-pearl and the story went that anybody who looked at it would die a horrible death. As far as anybody knew, the icon could be a picture of a dog, because the curse was so strongly believed. Nobody in living memory had ever set eyes upon the image and it was almost unbelievable coincidence that they were in the area almost.

In fact it was spoken in the ancient prophecy that the 'one'

would cast his eyes upon the mother of all and not be slain. As Ratto explained, the Elousa was in fact supposed to be the image of the Virgin of Tenderness and therefore 'the mother of all.' It was believed that one of the early brothers and doctors, St. Luke, had actually painted the icon with his sacred and arcane magic and it was his mystical devices that had given the image such power. St. Luke was eventually 'found-out'

and killed by the fledgling Christian community. If the prophecy were true, Ratto explained, then John would be able to look into the eyes of Elousa unharmed.

Although John was a practical man, with absolutely no belief in the spiritual and occult world, the thought somehow worried him. He presumed it was the dreams, eating away at his logical thought and tried to put the ideas of being struck by lightning out of his mind.

"Hopefully, our friends at Kykkos will be able to find a way for us to get off this island." Said Ratto, breaking John's deep thoughts.

"Yeah, let's hope." He replied looking into Ratto's eyes for reassurance.

They rounded a final tight bend and there before them grew

like a mighty giant a great white monastery, reminding John of Colditz from the Second World War. It stood firm and strong and somehow, regardless of

its stature, it called to John. Something inside him just needed to see what was inside this isolated place.

They battled through the stream of tourists, all meandering around the road, eating multicoloured ice creams in the short sleeve shirts and clicking the cameras as if the world were about to end. Ritardo didn't spare his horn and pressed on through the crowds regardless. A few Germans made unpleasant gestures that were returned by Levi in his own particular cool style. They eventually pulled up close to the big gates and left their Jeep illegally parked by the side of the road. Ratto pushed them to the front of the patiently waiting line of half-baked tourists and with a few words to a passing monk quickly gained entry via a side door. Once inside the heat of the sun suddenly disappeared and the noise of the babbling foreigners was nothing but a feint hum. John thought to himself that following this white and brown attired monk through the corridors of this holy monastery was like stepping back a thousand years in history. The whitewashed arches seemed to encapsulate time itself. Their shoes on the stone floor echoing a procession so solemn that Jesus himself could be waiting in the next room.

They passed small wooden doors with little iron bars and Cypriot names painted awkwardly in white on tiny black boards. There was no breeze, no noise and no smell. It was as if the whole place simply did not exist in reality just in the mind. Here, in this out of the way place no tourists were allowed to roam and the monks could freely go about their daily duties as they had for countless years. Occasionally one would emerge from a side room, bowed lowed with hands firmly in sleeves and then disappear again as quickly as he had come. It was a magical place, full of men who lived in their own little world's and yet all together.

Eventually they reached a much larger solid wooden door,

with black iron decorations. The silent monk who had seen them this far then rapidly disappeared into a side door and left them all standing alone in this unreal world. They stood silently and looked around them. The enclosed world seemed to come alive now with a riot of colour that they had not seen before. All around them were painted plaster walls with images of biblical tales. And yet something about these Greek influenced Byzantine styled frescoes was not quite right. The images of Mary with

Jesus seemed out of proportion and why were there pictures of snakes on almost every wall? Was it John, or did Jesus look green? His skin seemed to glisten in the sunlight, as if damp.

Suddenly the sound of rustling could be heard behind the big door and then it opened, slowly. They peered to see what was behind and yet the darkness was too deep. A voice beckoned them to come inside and so they dutifully followed its command. Once inside they could see that the interior was much different to outside. It would have been totally black had it not been for a single burning candle. It smelled fusty and damp and the air was thick with the same kind of smell they had discovered in the tomb at Paphos. A monk with his hood firmly in place stood by the now closed door and with his outstretched arm guided them to the back of the room.

Nobody spoke. Instead, they simply followed.

As they walked, the barrel vaulted room echoed with their steps and the cold darkness seemed to grow. They headed for the single candle that stood erect upon a golden stand. As they drew closer they could see a large and ancient looking casket that reminded John of the arks discovered in Tutankhamouns tomb. It was black with age and stood square and strong. The monk stopped by the ark covered his eyes with his right hand and pointed towards it with his left, taking a ritualistic step backwards as he did so.

"Well John." Said Ratto. "I guess you're on. Our friends have brought you to Elousa and now you must pass the test of the prophecy." And with that Ratto stepped backwards too,

followed quickly by the others leaving John alone by the ark.

"Oh come on, it's all rubbish." He said as he watched them edge away. "Look, I'll show you, a picture never hurt anyone."

John decided to show them what superstitious nonsense this all was and to open the box. Besides, his archaeological and historical curiosity would not have had it any other way. He leaned in towards the box and pulled the lid upwards. Then suddenly the room was full of light as the big wooden door

threw wide open behind them. They covered their eyes, now accustomed to the darkness.

"Stay where you are." Came the command and a gun shot let out a piercing scream, bringing plaster and stone crashing to the floor.

Slowly their eyes recovered and they could make out the silhouettes against the stark white doorway. There were seven in all and one of them was female. Nobody moved. Eliphas and Levi were in flanking positions and Ritardo had somehow moved so swiftly to cover John that even he hadn't noticed.

Eventually John's eyes adjusted to the light and he could now see the inside of the room it was covered from top to bottom in paintings of red and white serpents. Even the floor was swarming in them. As he followed the paintings upwards to the ceiling he could see a large T shaped cross with a snake nailed firmly in place.

"Nobody move." It was Nina Lamia. "Where is the Baptist?"

The question remained unanswered. A shot rang out and Ratto turned to Ritardo and motioned him to move aside.

"Ah, there you are." Nina smiled and walked calmly across the stone floor towards him. "You see John, you can't get rid of me so easily can you? I have many lives."

The six men followed slowly behind and outflanked Eliphas and Levi.

"So what are we doing here then?" Asked Nina as she walked up to John and kissed him on the mouth. She walked past him and saw the box by the wall. "I see, a box, there must be something important here for you to be so pathetically stupid leaving your stolen car outside." She motioned to her men to open the box.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you." Said Ratto.

"Silence!" Shouted Nina as one of the men hit Ratto with the butt of his pistol. He fell to the floor, blood pouring from his mouth.

"There's no need for violence Nina." Said John as he felt Ratto's pain.

"Open it." Said Nina, ignoring John's words.

Two of the men holstered their guns and opened the box.

Inside they found a large rectangular icon robed in ancient yellow linen. They lifted it out and placed it on the upturned lid, removing the wrappings as they did so, revealing a beautiful silvery shimmering picture box. John noticed Ratto and the others cover their eyes and Nina watched them closely too. She turned away from the icon, somehow realising that Ratto and the others might be right about something. As the two opened the twin doors to the sacred icon they stared intently at it. Within seconds they were lying on the floor dead. And yet nothing had happened. There had been no great flash of light, no gunfire, nothing, just two dead men. Ratto and his crew stole the moment and dived at the remaining men. Eliphas knocked Nina to the ground and her weapon skidded across the ancient floor. John ran too and dived at one of the loose pistols, rolling like some kind of cinematic hero and firing as he came to a full stop. He missed of course, but it didn't matter, as all four remaining men were now either dead

or unconscious.

The silent monk had darted for the doors and made his escape and suddenly there was a standoff between Nina who had managed to recover her pistol and the brotherhood.

"Now listen lady." Said Ratto, sweating. "You are out numbered and have no way to escape. I suggest you put down the gun and step back eh? Or thisa time I will not leave you alive."

Nina weighed up the situation and slowly placed her pistol on the cold floor.

"Good eh? Well done." Said Ratto. "Now John, quickly let's get this over with. Open the icon and look into our mothers eyes."

John turned and walked towards the silver icon lying unopened on the box. They all watched his every move. He raised it up gently and very slowly opened the doors. They were stiff, as if they hadn't been opened in centuries and John could hear the slight cracking noise as the hinges came back to life. As the doors opened the others looked away, fearful of the ancient curse.

Inside on there were three panels. John decided to look left and right first, before committing himself to the central and probably most important image. On the left there was an awkward painting of the Garden of Eden, with Adam and Eve around the Tree entwined by the snake. On the right there was a vision of hell so obscure and surreal that even Dali himself would have had trouble explaining the imagery. Here men, women and children were being skewered by ugly red demons and placed in boiling pots of bubbling oil. Weaving its way across the image a sinewy serpent watched with an almost nonchalant attitude, as sinners were tortured. It was as if it were saying 'I told you so.'

But John knew he couldn't put off the inevitable for long and so he closed his eyes for a moment, took a deep breath and then opened them again. There before him was the image of a beautiful Byzantine style Virgin, dressed in the most amazing azure fabric. Around her head was a golden halo and in the background a landscape of columns and pillars, temples and villas. It reminded him of somewhere and he couldn't quite put his finger on it.

Then his eyes suddenly became strangely adjusted to the image. It was a Virgin, perhaps 'the' Virgin, but only now did he become aware that the child in her arms was not normal. It was as if he was so used to seeing these images that his mind had simply re-created the picture for him from a construct of his own thoughts failing utterly to see what was truly in the picture in the first place. The child, wrapped in yellow linen cloth was covered in scales.

Chapter 13

OceanofPDF.com

Rome

John had survived his ordeal and now there was some kind of strange atmosphere amongst the members of the team. Life had suddenly become peculiar. No longer was the world the domain of man. Instead there was some kind of supernatural power involved. If the deaths of those two unfortunate henchmen hadn't been by some kind of trickery then the only answer was that the ancient prophecy was true and there was a power greater than man's involved. What that power was John just didn't know, but his whole outlook was rapidly changing.

He had never believed in God - not properly. But now his beliefs were being questioned. He desperately tried to bring some reasoning in, to balance the emotions in his mind with some logical thought. Surely it was some kind of trick?

Maybe Ratto or one of the others had somehow poisoned the men while he wasn't looking? For now he would try his best to use reason and logic to answer these unusual events.

Whilst the others, joined by several silent monks, cleared away the mess of dead bodies and finished off those still alive John examined the icon closely. He touched it, probed it and even tried to pull off the archaic painting to see if there was some kind of poison or device involved. The only thing he found was dust. He asked a couple of the others to take a look but they refused all except Nina who now had her hands firmly tied behind her back. She had been allowed to walk closer to the icon while the others remained in the background. John had opened the doors for her and she had stared at it intently. Nothing happened. It seemed, whatever it was about John that had brought him immunity was also part of Nina's make-up. This had set the tongues wagging and it was decided to keep her alive for the present. Maybe, John thought, this was all part of the game.

Word came down to the dark and ancient crypt that the Father Superior wished to see them. They finished disposing of the

bodies, which were taken away on wheelbarrows by the monks to some God forsaken place and made their way outside into the bright midday sun. The heat was a shock to the system which had become accustomed to the cool of the icon room and they were quickly lead down a long brightly painted corridor and then up some winding narrow stairs to the Father Superiors apartments. Along the way Ratto explained to John that the Brotherhood had created this monastic order hundreds of years ago as a separate cover from the Catholic Church. It was under the cloak of Greek Orthodoxy and yet kept its activities secret from those higher.

This underground stream was in fact to be found in all the religions of the world, from Buddhism to Islam and even within the myriad secret societies such as the Freemasons and the Rosicrucians. This way they maintained an eye and ear in every far-flung part of the globe and in every institution, awaiting the time and guarding the secrets. Occasionally some elements had been uncovered and disposed of by those in power and a battle of wits seemed to always be at play.

The little grunting guide knocked on the tiny wooden door and awaited a response.

"Come in." Came the deep reply in a strong Greek accent. The monk opened the door and saw them inside, shutting them in as he himself disappeared.

Inside the walls were whitewashed and a narrow irregular window allowed the streaming rays of the sun to light up the stone floor. At the back of the uneven room was a rough, dark wooden desk and chairs and behind that a tall, thickset man dressed in a white and brown robe with dark grey curly hair.

There was a brass oil burner, a large pen and knife on the desk joined only by a very old looking piece of wood with what looked like Latin writing on. The Father's hands were now outstretched to shake theirs as he stood, filling the room with his stature.

"Welcome Ratto and friends of the cause. Welcome." He

smiled warmly and motioned them to sit. "Please sit down."

They shook his hands one by one and introduced themselves.

John was last and it seemed that the Father held his hand a little longer than the other's and looked deeply into his eyes as if testing his spirit. Nina was pulled ungraciously to the floor beside Levi who took great pleasure in ensuring that every motion was painful for her.

"It seems you have brought us trouble my friends." He said has he took his seat.

"Yes, Father, please accept our apologies." Ratto responded trying not to make eye contact.

"No matter, the time is near." He glanced at John with a smile and placed his hands gently upon the piece of wood before him. "I have been going through the prophecy again to see if we have any clues to our next move."

"And?" Asked Ratto, moving to the edge of his chair.

"This is a copy of the prophecy you have all learned by heart.

It is in Aramaic and was crafted by the brothers here many years ago now." He looked down upon it as if it were the Holy Grail itself. "I believe there is more in this early translation than we have all believed."

"Interesting." Said John; now intrigued by the whole mad world he occupied. "Can you translate into English for us?"

"Of course, wait a moment let me read it to you." The Father reached inside his robe and pulled out a glass case. "Now let me see." He placed his thin glasses on the end of his strong nose and peered down. "Ah, that's better."

"Fools, it's all a lie." Nina struggled with Levi who responded by striking her so hard that she hit the white plastered wall and fell to the floor.

"Sorry Father, please continue." Levi smiled innocently and subtly kicked her in the stomach.

Father Superior glanced over the rim of his glasses at Levi and grinned, but also shook his head.

"It reads, Brethren of the Agathodaemon and all entrusted with the rule of time. These are the words of she who saw, who sees and who is the mother of time." The Father looked up and into every face in the room to ensure he had their full attention. "The day will come when he who is without a head shall rise in power. The sun and the moon shall mate and the crown shine in glory foreboding the end of Peter." He took a breath and nodded to Levi who hadn't noticed his captive trying to make for the door.

Levi jumped to his feet and wrestled Nina back to the front, slapping her as he did so. "Stay there woman." He said as he thrust her forward.

The Father continued as silence came back to the room. "But beware the harlot will be among you who will bring chaos."

They all turned to look at Nina, who looked more like a sick child than a bringer of doom. He continued. "The remnant shall be in those days like a lamb to the slaughter, beaten and bruised. It shall be hidden from all those who wish to see the glory of light. The One shall destroy chaos and bring the remnant into the light."

"Is that is?" Asked John, confused that such a short passage that was obviously very vague should be taken so seriously.

"Yes that's it John." Smiled the Father as he sat back on his big wooden chair. "But there is a difference with this interpretation to the one orally remembered by the Brothers."

"Yes, he's right." Said Ratto as he edged even further off his seat. "It mentions Peter!"

"Well done Ratto." Smiled the Father. "And how does that help?"

"It tells us where to go." Ratto looked like an excited child.

"Rome."

"I don't believe it. I just don't believe it." The new Pope was striding up and down his apartment in rage whilst Grand Master Villaret was flat on the floor with a large secret service boot firmly planted on his back. Things were turning bad for the Order as Pope Urban tightened his grip on the power base and the knights were scrambling around making mistakes. He may have risen in the ranks of the Order himself but he sure as hell wasn't going to let it mess things up for him now. "Listen Villaret, I could have you taken out and shot right now, but I won't, not yet anyway." He stopped pacing and turned to the fallen Grand Master. "You know about the prophecy don't you?"

"Yeh, yes." Replied Villaret, struggling to get the words out from under the pressure of the guard's foot. His face was firmly embedded in the rich burgundy carpet.

"Good. And did you know that in a little over two days there will be a solar eclipse?"

"Yes." He croaked.

"And you know what that means?"

"Yes."

"Good, we are making progress at last." The Pope swivelled and walked more calmly towards his long thing window and observed the fools below as he often did. To him it was like looking down into a Petrie dish, he wanted to place in some toxic substance and experiment with them. "And I suppose Villaret you know that the eclipse was centred upon Rome?"

"Rome?" Villaret tried to look up at Urban.

"Yes, our astronomers have confirmed the time also, around midday I believe." He turned to look at the pathetic Grand Master brought to his knees by the power of the Pope. "You have one simple job to do Master Villaret, find Lamia and find her quick. If you find Lamia, you will find the academic also.

Kill him, do you hear? And bring Lamia here. She must be here when the sun mates with the moon."

"Yes your Holiness."

"Good. If she has done her job as instructed then things are not lost."

Chapter 14

OceanofPDF.com

Escape

"You have no authority here Grand Master." Father Superior slammed his fist on the wooden desk. Villaret had flown straight into Cyprus; the last place that Dame Lamia had been and then sped up into the mountains to the last reported location of her and the six men he had sent to help. There had been no word from any of them in twenty-four hours and it was obvious these Greek monks had something to do with it.

Every way he turned he was being stopped and slowed down.

It had taken him over an hour just to get into Kykkos and then a further hour to get an audience with the Father Superior. He just knew they were stalling him.

"Listen Father." He said.

"No, you listen to me. You Catholics think you can run the world. You think you can walk into Cyprus and start telling us what to do." He was going to stretch this rage out as far as it would go and buy more time. "We split a long time ago my friend and both sides agreed to our differences, do you hear? I answer to no Popery and I certainly do not answer to one of his little knights."

"Yes, I know all that Father." Villaret decided to try a different tactic before resorting to violence. "But in the name of peace and Christian brotherhood I implore you to see sense." He wiped the sweat from his brow and took a seat to try and calm the situation down. Pouring himself a glass of water he offered Father Superior a friendly face. "My men and Dame Lamia were on the trail of a small group of men who have stolen something very precious to his Holy Father and it is my job to get it back."

"Stolen? What have they stolen?"

"It is nothing of value to the outside world, but to his

eminence it is of great importance." He sipped from his glass and watched the Father's eyes closely for traces of deceit. "All I ask is whether you have seen these men, or my own recently? It would have been last night or even this morning."

"I have seen nobody Grand Master." He turned to his small window and held his hands fast behind his back. "I spend my time in here, in cloisters, with my brothers and in prayer. I occasionally meet with visitors, but only important ones. I have seen nobody." He turned and walked towards the door.

"Now, wait here a while and I will go and see if any of the brothers have seen anything peculiar." But Villaret rose from his seat too.

"No Father, let me ask them, I don't want to put you to any trouble."

"It is no trouble my son, please sit, drink your water."

Father Superior walked faster than he had done in years, taking at least three steps in each stride. He headed for the back rooms where nobody except the brothers were allowed.

It was late evening and darkness was invading the land. The small sparkling lights of the monastery always gave a sense of peace and calm and with the gentle warmth of the dusk it could almost be that there wasn't a care in the world. But there was hidden turmoil here as a small band of five men and one female captive were being crammed into an old Citroen 2cv and sent off through the secret network.

Father Superior arrived just in time to see them off and decided to have a drink of his finest wine while he stalled the Grand Master.

As they pulled away Ritardo crunched the gears and even pulled on the hand brake by accident, unused to the strange configuration on this French car. The route before them had been prepared by a secret network of brothers who were all

waiting to see them to safety and with two brand new mobile phones they had a means of clean contact. They headed into northern Cyprus where they boarded a speedboat that took them in the dead of night into Turkey. It was an exhilarating ride from Famagosta round the tip of Cyprus and across the open waters to Mersin. Once there they were collected in an old Toyota pickup truck and taken to a nearby dirt runway where a small propeller plane flew them to Izmir. Once rested they were then flown by helicopter to Paiania outside Athens and from there another plane to Lecce in Italy. On the whole journey they somehow managed to avoid customs and were smoothly transferred. It was an amazingly well orchestrated transfer that revealed the incredible extent of the brotherhood throughout the world.

th

In Lecce they rested, staying the night in a beautiful 18

century farmhouse on the outskirts of town. Next morning they gathered their things, ate a hearty breakfast and were on the road to Rome. The old Fiat car they were given made the most horrendous noise as they sped around the thin bumpy roads and they had to stop every couple of hours to let the engine cool down. Hours past by and eventually they arrived at a little village called Motemarano. Here they were met as the sun was just disappearing and taken to a small house in the middle of a beautiful vineyard. The glow of the falling sun cast an eerie orange light that made the terracotta roof tiles seem to come alive. They all showered and then emerged onto a wooden terrace where they were fed well with warm bread and pasta. By now Nina had been allowed to have free hands.

She was obviously no threat in the middle of nowhere and had shown no inclination to escape. At the end of the day, they were all heading in the same direction. If she were to be a threat anywhere, then it would be in Rome.

They were joined on the terrace by the farmer and his wife who had no idea why this strange group had landed on their farm. They were simply following the orders of a local priest who insisted that they asked no questions and told nobody of their involvement. Ratto and the others chatted quietly with

the ageing couple and after dinner John decided to go for a walk around the vineyard with a cigarette and a glass of wine.

"Mind if I come?" Asked Nina.

"No, if it's ok with the others." John looked at Ratto who gave him a nod of the head once he had surveyed the area and seen that John had his pistol in his pocket.

They both walked slowly down the terrace steps and followed the twinkling lights of the farmstead towards a small pile of stones that were the remains of an old Roman villa. There was a sign in Italian and John could read enough to see that it had been excavated in the 1980's and had itself been a villa on a vineyard over two thousand years before.

"Is this your first time to Italy?" Nina asked as they stood and surveyed the remains of the villa.

"No, I have been here a few times." He glanced at her. Even though he knew what she was and that given half a chance she would have killed him, there was something serenely attractive about her. Her figure was classically curved and her eyes had a sparkling green tint that would have inspired any great painter. He watched her lick her lips and for some mad reason he wanted to kiss them.

"I enjoyed our night together." She said turning to look him in the eyes.

"How can you say that?" He turned away. "I could only hold myself for a few moments."

"All the same, there was something electric about it." Now she looked embarrassed and it revealed to John a human side that he really hadn't thought possible. It also rang true for him.

There was something strange between them, some kind of chemical attraction maybe?

"Why do you suppose that was?" John asked as he lit another cigarette.

"I don't know." She held her hand out for a smoke. "I can have my pick of men John and you ain't nothing special on the physique side of things. And yet I find you very attractive. Go figure."

Then John remembered the icon at Kykkos. It seemed like a million years ago now and yet it was only a few days. Both he and Nina had remained unaffected and they were also attracted. His scientific mind raced looking for biological answers and chemical traits that might give him some answer.

"Where you from?" He thought that maybe some background might give him a clue.

"I was born in Washington DC. My parents were big shots in the publishing world and were both members of the Order."

She blew smoke across the twilight of the Roman villa, like mist across time.

"And where was your family from originally? Lamia isn't an Anglo-Saxon name for sure."

"Well, my fathers side of the family originate in Turkey and my mothers side in Israel." She sipped some wine and looked at him. "Why?"

His mind raced. It was a strange thought, that her genetic background was in the same place as his own supposed family. Maybe there was some kind of tribal genetic structure that made them so attracted to one another?

"Well, I was just trying to bring some science in you see. I can't accept the peculiar almost paranormal reasoning behind that icon thing."

"I see." She smiled and held his arm, the touch, however

slight, affecting them both. "I don't know John, I just know that your friends are fighting against the power of God and I don't think that's a good idea."

"How can you say that?" He pulled away. "How can anybody's God try and kill people to cover up the slaughter of ages past?"

"There's more to it all than that John." She was finally seeing what they had told him to get him on their side. "These guys have lied to you. Yes there were battles in ancient times, but you have to decide for yourself which side to take." She turned and looked back at the small group, noticing that Ratto was watching her closely. "These guys are worshippers of the devil John, they worship the snake. I am just a guardian of truth in the church of the true God. Yes we bend the rules, but only in the fight against evil."

John's mind was racing; he didn't know what to think sometimes. But when he looked in her eyes he was overwhelmed with lust and some kind of inner attraction that he simply could not deny.

"All this talk of the devil and God is for you and them, not me.

I don't believe in either and never will." He started to walk back to the farmhouse. "I am only in this to clear my name and because I have nothing left."

John walked back to his attic room, washed and went straight to bed. He sat for a while and smoked, staring out of his little windowless opening at the sky full of billions of stars. The sight always made him feel insignificant and tiny and yet tonight he saw nothing but confusion as if the stars were a mirror to his own mind.

He eventually fell exhausted into a deep sleep and began to dream. It was a strange feeling because he was conscious and yet unconscious. He was perfectly aware that he was asleep

and yet could still hear the coot of the barn owl that had motioned him downwards into slumber. The darkness and stars had fallen with him into the depth of his dreams and he could almost reach out and touch them. There was some strange familiarity about them, as if he knew exactly where he was and yet he was nowhere near earth. They grew brighter and brighter in intensity until eventually there was no darkness left and the heat of a millions suns burnt his eyes.

Blinking and rubbing he eventually recognised a familiar hot dusty smell of that unnamed African town. He could hear the thumping of batons on palms

and old men mocking.

There was something much more real this time - it was as if he were really there. The intensity of the senses was almost overwhelming and he had to reach down to feel the dust with his hands. His eyes quickly became accustomed to the bright sun and he looked around at the all too real scene. For some reason he was aware of every movement, every smell and sound all at once. He stood and let the dust fall between his fingers, feeling the sensation of every grain. To his right the old men seemed to have a strange glow around them like some weird aura. Then the echoing lament began and he knew his role. He was about to begin his journey when he felt a cool, soft hand on his shoulder. He turned and there before him was Nina with her green eyes and naked body. He was transfixed and could not move. She embraced him and suddenly he felt at home as if his journey had ended.

Chapter 15

OceanofPDF.com

The Enemy

Villaret kicked Father Superior in the stomach one more time just for the hell of it. These Greek Orthodox idiots had messed with the Vatican one last time and he was in the mood for getting angry. The tall priest lay on the floor in a pool of blood surrounded by his own monks. He had precious little life left in him now, but Villaret had kept him alive long enough to watch every single man die. Regardless of how much pain they were all put to they revealed nothing, each man maintaining to the end that they were sinless in the site of their Lord.

Of course Villaret hadn't done the deed himself, he had actually brought in a crack squad of his own who also had ties to the Jesuits. It was a sort of emergency reaction force used when operatives were in trouble or needed something covering up. They moved in, dealt with the problem, cleaned up, covered their tracks and then disappeared without a trace.

Ever since the new Pope had come to power they had been very busy and several Cardinals had suddenly died of natural causes. Their training was simply the best that could be bought and they were all men who had worked in the industry for some time. There were two loading bodies into bags who had been ex-CIA and another one loading the bags onto the truck had been a top hit man in the SAS. There were several outside in the courtyard washing away the blood who were still employed by the British Royal family with a kind of shared use scheme. In the streets outside the tourists were being kept at bay with signs claiming that some sort of pathogenic disease had affected the inhabitants and that it would probably not open for several days. This had been a standard practice now for decades and they tended to use it for enclosed places such as hotels, cruise liners and now of course, a monastery. It had the adverse affect of bringing down the media on the location, but most of them could easily be fed rubbish and the rest were under the power of the

Church one way or another. This way too the men and bodies could all disappear in medical vehicles and leave behind a perfectly set up scene. In the end news of this viral contaminant only hit the local press.

Villaret looked down at the dying priest one last time and almost pitied him. He had spent most of his sorrowful life in a prison of his own making, teaching others and fostering brotherly love only to then watch them all die a painful death one by one. Now he too was slipping away and all for what?

To save a Canadian academic, it just didn't make sense. No matter how hard they all tried they couldn't find any evidence for where the outlaws had gone and so they started to torture.

All through the night they had pulled fingers off and gouged out eyes and yet nobody would talk. Even the Father Superior had his testicles removed with a blunt knife, but all that happened was that he had fallen into unconsciousness and it had taken several hours before he could be brought around.

Finally they were on the last three monks when one of the old Mosad agents had found a clue. Lightly scratched into the floor of Father Superiors office were the letters 'Rome.' It was their best lead and Villaret assumed that this was the work of Dame Lamia. Hopefully she would keep her head and stay out of trouble long enough to reveal their whereabouts once they arrived in Rome. For some reason this rebellious bunch were heading into the viper's nest.

It was early in the morning when John, Ratto and the others were dropped close by the Coliseum. The sun was warming the air nicely and a clear blue sky heralded a perfect day over ancient Rome. Nina was now out of shackles and walked quite normally with the others towards the heart of Rome and the Vatican. They made their way slowly, trying to avoid looking conspicuous and stopped once to sit and drink coffee and eat warm bread. As John sat there, smoking a cigarette, looking around at the ornate buildings of this ancient city he suddenly realised where he had seen the images before. These

were the buildings from the Elousa icon. These same buildings had been in the background of that peculiar work of art. There were more buildings now, more clutter and more people, but the scene was unmistakable. This was why John had vaguely recognised the image in Kykkos. Whoever had

painted the icon, had done so in Rome and this confirmed that they were in the right place.

"It's too early to go to the Vatican." Said Ratto as he slurped down his coffee like a condemned man. "We need to let the tourists build up first."

"I agree." John replied. "We should look like tourists and maybe wander around a little." He had something in mind, there was something forming inside his thoughts. It was strange, but he knew this place. He suddenly knew the artist of the icon, or at least his thoughts and he knew that some clue had been hidden nearby. And then he saw a small church with a green-blue statue of the Virgin Mary recessed on the façade and he knew he had to go inside. He couldn't put his finger on the impulse, he just knew that he had to follow his intuition he had to enter the Church of the Mother of God. For too long he had grappled with the world of his conscious and now he knew it was time to listen to his inner voice. He had nothing to lose after all and there simply was no other answer to the puzzle. For some reason he knew that he and Nina were part of this thing and it was deeper than any rational thought.

"It's getting hot, lets go and have a look around that church."

They all agreed and as they finished their drinks and gathered their things they all meandered towards the church of San Giovanni.

Once inside they split into pairs and agreed on a thirty-minute interlude as they all collected their thoughts, cooled down and enjoyed what might have been their last few moments of freedom and life. John and Nina veered to the right and walked slowly admiring the ornate stonework and stained

glass windows. Because John's perceptions were now so incredibly open to snakes he noticed the images of St. Paul destroying serpents and of Mary crushing them underfoot.

There seemed to be more in here than anywhere he'd been before. At the top of each column was a bowl and inside the bowl was a winged serpent. John wondered at the significance, he wondered why this house of the Lord should be overrun with images of snakes and why nobody ever noticed.

After a while his senses simply couldn't take anymore in and he motioned Nina towards a long dark wooden bench at the end of the row of columns. They walked slowly and sat down.

John's hand went to the back of his neck and he rubbed a growing pain in his muscles that was forcing a headache to emerge. He looked down at the medieval stones and stared, almost blankly into them. His mind was becoming vacant as he fought the pain and his troubles were growing ever more distant. He could have been on holiday with his wife for all he knew now. He lingered in the moment and enjoyed the thought for as long as he could. He deluded himself with images of them together again, this time in Rome, eating at fine restaurants and dancing the night away in some exclusive Roman hotel. But then his consciousness roused him again into the real world and the shock of it was almost as bad as the reality itself. He shook his head, as if physically trying to shake off the predicament of his situation. He was being chased by some of the most dangerous people on the planet.

The faster he ran the closer they seemed to get and here he was sitting inside a dark medieval building created around the lies and deceit of the very thing from which he ran and yet it was where he must be. The paradox of the situation almost made him laugh. However it was a paradox that seemed to somehow make sense and to balance out his thoughts. He was between two different world's in complete safety and yet in total danger. For some reason he just knew this was exactly where he was supposed to be.

Then he sat upright, his back against the cold stone of a huge

column and he looked up. He didn't notice it at first. All he saw was a colourful painting, filled with non-descript characters in some kind of religious parade. But as he looked the image began to invade his mind. Who was that man in the centre? It looked like Moses with his long beard and the shining rays emerging from his skull. Either side were hundreds of people from all walks of life, appearing to watch this aged man as he seemed to be walking towards a large freshly dug hole in the ground. And what was that in his arms?

John focused and was shocked to find that it was the icon from Kykkos - Elousa. It was firmly closed shut and held with the utmost of care, but it was definitely the icon. Everybody in the huge wall painting was staring at it and not at Moses as John had assumed, but not one of them had eyes except for Moses.

The whole picture gave the impression that Moses was about to bury the sacred icon in the hole. And then John noticed the buildings. Behind was the Coliseum, to the left was the Palace of Farnesse and to the right was the Church of St. Maria in Aracoeli. A mad thought struck John in an instant.

"Quick, come on." He said to Nina as he grabbed her by the arm and they ran for the doorway.

Once outside John quickly looked around for a stall or shop.

"There." He shouted and ran across the busy road, almost being run down by several passing Fiat's and Alfa Romeo's.

He made it to a street vendor and scoured the colourful cart.

"Here. Buy this." He thrust a street map into Nina's hand as she took out some Euro's from her purse and paid the bemused dark-skinned Italian.

They ran back to the church and inside, passing Ratto and the others who were on their way outside to find John and Nina.

"What'sa goin on?" Shouted Ratto as John hurried passed.

"Come on!" Came John's reply.

They all finally gathered before the huge wall painting and

John knelt on the ground and opened the map. Frustratingly he searched for the three buildings as he explained. But then a priest walked by and noticed them scrambling on the floor.

John quickly folded the map up again and smiled at the priest.

Ratto spoke a few words in Italian, which sounded to John like something about a mad American and the priest smiled, gave them the sign of benediction and walked on. They waited a few moments and then John unfolded the map again.

"See up there," he pointed at the painting, "that's the secret being hidden Ratto. There is a clue to the location. The three buildings give us triangulation. It's brilliant."

Ratto suddenly caught on and noticed the Elousa icon in the arms of the bearded old man. He fell to his knees to help John while the others excitedly murmured their approvals.

"Here, the Parthenon." Said Ratto as he placed his hand on the ancient Coliseum. Quickly they found the others and with a pencil dredged from the deepest recesses of Nina's handbag they triangulated the location of the hole in the ground. They sat back in awe. It pointed to the Via dell Arco - the way of the Ark.

Within minutes all hope of appearing to be tourists had disappeared and they were hurtling round the busy mid-morning Roman streets, knocking over frail nuns and girls on bikes. They raised several eyebrows and Ratto even bounced off a passing taxi to the Latin yells of abuse.

And then there they were, stood quite still on the Via della Arco. As they stood and looked around them sweat ran like boiling torrents. They breathed heavily from the race and exhaustion screamed from every muscle. But they forced themselves to scour the lie of the land. It didn't look like anything special and so they fanned out and began to walk the length of the street. It was a typical Roman street with an odd mixture of buildings of all sizes and styles. Here and there could be found ancient Roman remains of walls and the road

itself was narrow and bowed. It was fairly quiet and only small cars, mopeds and bicycles seemed to bother to drive up and down.

They were halfway when John stopped and the others followed suit, as if knowing their only lead was with the intuition of this sorrowful man. He

was staring up at a peculiar looking building that seemed to be a collection of several hundred years of architectural intricacies. It leaned awkwardly to the right and was built directly into an ancient Roman wall.

"This is where the archway would have been." Said John pointing now to the ground. "That wall there must have continued across the street, but collapsed or was pulled down for some reason." He pointed upwards now towards the house. "See there, you can just make out where the archway began."

They all saw and murmured agreement, looking back at John for further clues.

"So now what?" Asked Ratto. "Do we start to dig up the street?"

"I don't know." Said John as his head began to ache. But it was too late. None of them had noticed that before them and behind them the road had been closed off by the Policia who were now training their weapons on the small band. Eliphas grunted something into Ratto's ear and shock and defeat ran across his features in an instant. Now they were all aware of their predicament. They had few options. Give themselves up, or risk being shot and head for one of the doorways. With one spirit, including Nina, they ran for the peculiar looking house built into the Roman arch and shots began to ring out.

Glass shattered around them and John felt the floor come alive as the stinging vibrations of bullets on stone reached his taught nerves. He crashed through the doorway and turned to help the others inside and then he noticed Eliphas lying on the

floor behind them in a pool of dark blood. He didn't move as more bullets smashed into his lifeless corpse. Then two or three hit his head and it seemed to explode like a firework.

John immediately bent over and threw up his breakfast. The world span around him as he reached his arms out to stop his fall.

Almost instantly he felt the strong arms of Ratto pulling him onwards as they pushed back the solid door and bolted it. The inside was a blur to John, he remembered thinking that it seemed dark and unused. Slowly his sight grew accustomed to his grief and the dark and he noticed that they were in some kind of Catholic shop for priests. The old wooden shop counter was empty save for an antique looking cash desk and a few papers. It might have been something from a horror film. Behind the desk were rows of thin drawers labelled in Times Roman with Latin names and hung here and there were dull looking rosaries and crucifixes.

"There's no way out of the back." Said Ratto as he rushed allways looking for an exit. "We go up or down. There's the stairway, it may lead to some kind of rooftop escape." He pointed to a narrow opening to the left and behind the dark wooden desk. The place was deserted. "Or there's some stone stairs down, which may lead to a cellar or catacombs." He looked at John for an answer.

"Down." Said John intuitively focusing his mind through the pain it had just suffered. Surely, if there was something hidden then it would be down, and the only real way out of this mess was to get to this secret. They owed it to Eliphas to finish this thing.

They filed down the old, damp and dark stone stairway as Ratto followed up behind with his gun drawn. He had pulled an old leathery chair to the top of the stairs and lodged it so as to cause an irritation to anybody who followed and pushed the heavy desk in front of the doorway.

The stairs seemed to go on and on and several times John and Nina slipped, falling heavily onto the cold stone. It was dark now and they pulled out a couple of torches from their sacks, the light flashing eerily around like lighthouses in hell.

Behind them they heard the thumping on the thick shop door.

So far they hadn't heard the telltale crash that meant the police had entered the building. The cold was increasing as they clambered downwards for what seemed an eternity. Then quite suddenly they came to a small but solid doorway with a huge white diagonal cross-painted on it.

"X marks the spot." Said John half-joking, but knowing from his research that this myth was in fact based upon the markings of ancient secret societies.

They examined the door, looking for a way through, but Levi sat alone behind them, mourning his loss, tears running down his face for his lost brother. As he sat and watched, his thoughts of loss turned to thoughts of hate and rage grew within him, giving him strength to continue. It is a peculiar human trait that sorrow can be the source of strength.

It seemed impossible to get through the doorway; there was no handle, no lock, just a solid door that wouldn't move. Ratto fired a few shots into it, but the bullets simply embedded into the door. Nina walked back to Levi and sat with him, placing her arm around him while John and Ratto concentrated their energies. Then a loud crash was heard from the top of the stairs - the shop door had finally given way.

"Shit." Said John, expressing what they were all feeling. For some reason, Nina was now so taken up with the chase that she was no longer sure of her loyalties. She had spent time with these "devil worshippers" and was not sure of her own thoughts. Seeing Levi in this state and almost feeling part of the team she associated with them and felt their pain a pain she could so easily have helped to create. And so, she internally had decided to see it through and not hinder the progress. In fact she was also incredibly intrigued by the

whole thing. It was more than just some energised hormonal rush; there was something peculiar about this whole thing that seemed to talk to her very soul. As she had spent time with these people she had discovered a bond within her that she had never felt on the other side. Her role as Dame Lamia was one of taking orders and impressing her superiors. Here and now she was an equal and her emotions told her that these people were more than just trustworthy, they were part of her own destiny. She felt she was discovering her real self and for the first time she liked what she found.

John stood back from the door and looked at it. It stood about five feet tall with an arched top to meet the arched ceiling. It was dark brown thick wood and nearly black with age, with two thick iron straps top and bottom.

Feeling the door hadn't helped. Neither had kicking, shooting and even asking. This door could only be opened from the other side.

Then slowly a creaking could be heard and a thin beam of warm, dim, light appeared around the edges of the door as they all heard the crashing of the wooden chair from the top of the stairs. Behind them their adversaries were gaining ground and yet before them somebody on the other side was opening the door. They all stood back and pointed their guns. It seemed like agonising minutes passed by before the door was fully open revealing a low arched medieval room lit by candles on the other side and one solitary monk dressed in pure white ushering them in with a slow graceful motion of his outstretched arm. The whole image was so surreal that Nina giggled and John, Levi and Ratto almost forgot their friends demise up in the real world above.

For some reason they lowered their weapons and walked in one by one. The monk slowly closed the door behind them and moments later there came the sound of thudding and shots being fired into the door. They had escaped with seconds to spare.

"Fear not." Said the monk in a deep, low, almost whisper of a

voice. "The door will hold for several hours."

John turned to the monk. He wanted answers. "What is this place?"

"We have been here for centuries my friend, waiting for you."

The monk smiled and motioned them towards the open archway at the end of the room, but as he motioned Ratto noticed that beneath the white cloak was a dark suit. He slowly placed his hand into his pocket and clicked off the safety of his gun. They all followed solemnly contemplating the whole strange situation, with Ratto forcefully taking up the rear behind the monk. It was a world below a world; a silent enclave in a busy city.

They reached the archway and stopped suddenly. There before them was a room full of candles with a large grey casket or coffin in the centre big enough to take two full-grown men. Stood behind the coffin was a row of

men dressed in dark suits and in the centre of them was Grand Master Villaret.

It was pointless to fight. They were outnumbered and outgunned and so neither Ratto, nor John or Levi went for their guns. Instead they were overcome with a sense of defeat and deflation. Nobody moved for what seemed an age and then Villaret slowly began to walk around the coffin.

"You have done an amazing thing my friends." He said looking at the floor and then up and into their eyes one by one.

"You have managed to escape the clutches of the most powerful organisation on the face of the planet." He stopped and placed a hand upon the coffin. "And all for what? Do any of you know what it is you strive to see?"

Nobody answered, for nobody could. Instead their minds were rushing through a million outcomes. Nina wondered whether she should play her trump card and try to fool the Grand Master, but she could see danger in his eyes and

decided to hold the thought for a while. John was quickly thinking how he could use his knowledge and wit to verbally evade the inevitable. Ratto was scouring the room like a man possessed for escape routes and options and Levi steamed with hatred that would only be defused by risking all.

"You believe that we hold some kind of secret that could change the world. You see us as the evil doers in all things.

And yet we are quite the opposite." He walked around a little more, as if in deep thought. "It became obvious that we could not stop you from reaching this underground world and so I decided to simply wait here for you."

"You are a liar." Said Ratto calmly. "The Catholic Church has hidden the truth for centuries and battled against us for as long. If there's nothing to hide then reveal what you have hidden. Our legacy!" he spat the last few words with venom.

"Ah, your legacy. Yes, I agree, it is time to reveal to you what you have fought for so long. You believe that we have hidden the Messiah from the world do you not little Ratto?" The Grand Master smiled like a cool reptile.

"More than that you Latin filth. You murdered the whole race for your power. You wiped a species from the face of the planet and have hidden the truth to maintain your stranglehold."

"Such anger." Smiled Villaret. "It is true, we fought a long battle and we won. But we struggled against the demon seed of hell, see for yourself." And with those last words he beckoned his men to open the coffin. They walked forward and slowly pushed the lid to one side. "Come, take a look at the last of your kind."

John was first. He walked forward and was followed by the others. The candlelight flickered and the sound of their movements echoed around the cavernous room.

Finally John would discover the secret. Finally he would see this fabled ancestor, but then what? What would Grand Master Villaret do with them all? His mind raced trying to devise a plan of escape and that's when it struck him.

Within the blink of an eye he had knocked two of Villaret's men to the ground with the large heavy candlestick he had deftly raised from the floor. Instantly Ratto and Levi had followed suite and taken down the remaining men, leaving only Villaret who was running for the door at the opposite end of the room. But he was too slow. Nina had seen him go and she now confirmed to herself her new found anarchy as she knocked Villaret to the ground and kicked him swiftly in the head. The monk stood back, faking his serenity, whilst fumbling for his gun hidden within his cloak. But Ratto remembered deceit and knocked the fake monk unconscious with a single blow of the candlestick.

Suddenly the room was silent and the dust and candlelight began to settle back to equilibrium. The only sound was the feint thudding from the stairway door. Nina walked up to John and took his hand. In that instant they both knew that they were meant for each other. Ratto, Levi, John and

Nina walked towards the coffin together, as one. They all pushed the lid until it fell to the ground with an earth-shattering thud.

Several hours later they were on the road in a stolen black Mercedes heading north to Switzerland and safety. Very little had been said about what they had seen. All they knew was that their life of danger had only just begun.

The coffin held the form of a huge creature. It was the only way they could describe it, because none of them believed it to have once been human. It had two legs, two arms and a torso, but its pale and ancient dry skin was covered in scales, as if it had been a cross between a snake and a human. Its head was elongated, exactly the same as the heads that brought John into this fantastic world of intrigue and deception. It

wore a simple white robe with a small red cross on the top right hand corner, that was now so old and frail that it simply crumbled to dust on touch. On its head was a golden headband with a serpent emerging like the crowns of the Egyptian pharaoh's. Within the bony grasp of the corpse was a small pot jar. John had taken it and the crown and they had fled for their lives out of the back door and through the ancient catacombs of Rome, emerging somewhere on the Isola Tiberina unseen.

Using money they had stolen from the Master and his cohorts they dumped the Mercedes and hired an old battered Fiat, brought some fresh clothes and sped to relative safety. They knew that they would be followed.

As they escaped Rome, John cracked open the ancient jar to reveal a small leather parchment inside tied with a leather string. He opened it carefully and found that the writing upon st

it was in 1 century Latin. It had taken him two hours to translate the scroll and this is what it said:

"They shall come when the light [or sun] shines most, who will be of our blood. We called in the darkness before and we will call again. We cried in the wilderness of their coming. We held the cup of wisdom to the world of

the profane and were smitten. And so we left our seed within their blood for future restoration.

His light shall guide the world. Her wisdom shall guide the light. Together they shall restore and the phoenix shall be resurrected."

John read it a hundred times. He read it to the others. He applied all-manner of ciphers that he knew to try and discover the hidden secret. But he knew, and Nina knew, what the secret was and it was time to find safety.

The ancient ones had been wiped off the face of the planet by the new Christian power base. They had been hunted down like vermin and now tales of dragon slaying and serpent eradication were the all that remained. But they had the last

laugh. They left their genetic marker in the two chosen ones, to be passed on until the greatest clock of all - the sun - would reach its penultimate state and trigger the genome. The time was near; the sun was reaching its zenith and the two separate elements of the ancient bloodline were on the run, protected only by the Brotherhood of the Snake.

Epilogue

The wind was howling like a newborn baby as the thick snow grew by the second. Nina had never seen snowflakes so large in her life and she found it quite exciting. Luckily she was on the inside of the window looking out.

They were in Edinburgh, Scotland, in a rented room, overlooking the famous castle that clung to the ancient volcanic outcrop like a limpet. Right now it looked like a fairy cake covered in shiny white icing. The cars on Princess Street below were occasional colourful interludes between the falling white carpet and the sight of Christmas decorations strewn everywhere was a pleasant distraction for troubled minds.

Nina sipped her tea. Life was complicated, but at least they were well cared for. Money, it seemed, was no object to the Brotherhood; they had been in operation for centuries and so had accumulated some wealth. Here, she was told, she would be safe for a while, as Scotland held secret members,

descended from the infamous Saint Claire, who were really quite powerful. And so Nina and John assumed new names and rented a beautiful furnished apartment, whilst Ratto and the others took up protective homes nearby. They were always within sight of the pair and their constant vigilance had paid off in the last few months.

It was whilst on their way to Scotland as they drove through Europe. They had stayed in a small hotel in Paris near the Gare du Nord. Ratto had gone out to swap cars for the hundredth time leaving Levi to watch Nina and John. But the alert had already gone out to all the hotels and within minutes the French police were down on them.

When Ratto came back to the hotel he found it surrounded by armed police and stood on the opposite street corner amongst the milling crowds to give him cover and time. But he need not have worried, Levi had been ahead of the game and by the

time the police had stormed their rooms, Nina, John and Levi were in the café Montmartre watching Ratto furtively scratch his head amongst the crowd.

That was months ago now and they had managed to get out of Paris and across the channel into Dover. They spent a couple of months in a little white beach house in St Margaret's Bay where John and Nina had grown closer, made love like newlyweds and walked hand in hand up and down the pebble beach.

Now it was midwinter and they were Mr and Mrs Stone from Arkansas, visiting Scotland on an extended tour of the British Isles at least that was the story to the outside world. They spent their time sightseeing and shopping for new clothes, while preparations were made by the extended Brotherhood for a semi-permanent home in the Hebrides. The role now was to protect the secret.

Nina heard a noise form the bedroom. It was John, stirring from slumber. He'd had a late night drinking with Ratto and Levi down at the Stuart Inn with some of the Scottish brethren. They often did this to discuss plans and get to know the people better with whom they would have to share several

years of their life. On the whole John thought they were a great bunch and the conversation helped John, Ratto and Levi get used to the Scottish accent and way of life. In Edinburgh foreigners were everywhere and so they fitted in well, but in the Hebrides they would soon be recognised as Canadian or Italian and so they had to slowly gather their new identities.

Nina too often tried to make conversation with the locals in the restaurants and shops, but she was not somebody who liked pubs and drinking. Besides, she was nearly due.

"Morning." Said John as he emerged from the bedroom dressed in only shorts. The heating in the apartment only ever worked on hot or off.

"Morning sire." Nina replied. "Want some breakfast?"

John grumbled his approval and Nina walked slowly to the kitchen with one hand on her stomach. She refilled the coffee maker, placed toast on the grill and cracked a couple of eggs into the frying pan. John followed and wrapped his arms around her from behind as she tossed the eggs.

"Sleep well." She said looking at her watch a quarter to twelve.

"Yeah sure." He walked to the basin and splashed some water on his face to try and come around. "We are nearly there with the plans for the cottage. It's been fitted out now and the furniture is on its way."

"That's great John. When can we move in?" She was anxious to nest.

"We decided it was best to wait for the arrival and then go." He looked at her for a reaction. He knew she was eager to move into a more permanent location. For nearly ten months they had been on the move and he had lost count of how many hotels and hostelries they had stayed in. A lot of the time had been spent sleeping outdoors in the car or in a tent. But the last few weeks had become a strain on them all and none more so than poor Nina. She didn't have the friendship of the men of the Brethren as John did. She spent hours alone whilst John had been out scouring the countryside with his new friends to find a place to rest. She couldn't make friends of the locals, it was just too dangerous. All she could do was chat occasionally to

people in shops and cafes. It had been a very lonely few months. But at least they were clean, warm and not least, safe. This apartment had been a nice respite from the constant movement something she had sorely needed. But the knowledge that it was not her own and that it was only temporary still jarred at her. She had a drive now like never before to settle down and live an ordinary life.

"OK." She knew it would surprise John, but she had no strength for a fight and she knew it had been a collective

decision. They knew the lie of the land and they only had her good intentions at heart she was sure of that now. She started to pour him a coffee, but the cup was only half full when she suddenly dropped the coffee pot and held her stomach with both hands. She fell slowly to her knees and let out a long moan. The floor became awash with fluid as her waters broke.

John ran to the phone and called Ratto.

Several hours later they were in the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. There were friends all around protecting the anonymity of the new family. It was a pleasant and quiet room with a window overlooking the back streets of the city. Ratto and Levi paced up and down the corridor outside, eager to see the new arrival. They had heard that the birth had gone well and that they were now to protect the new male heir.

Inside the room Nina and John stared in disbelief at their new child. They had been staring for what seemed hours. He lay there, asleep and unaware of his own circumstances. There had been some shock in the birthing room and they all knew that the best thing they could do now was to get away from the hospital as fast as possible. Rumours would spread of this child and his supposed genetic problem.

He had been born at 6 minutes past 6am after only a short labour. Instantly the staff had all noticed and the silence of the midwife and nurses had told John and Nina that something wasn't right. The child had been born with his green eyes wide open. His head appeared deformed, almost elongated. But that wasn't all. His skin was covered in scales.

Timeline of the Snake

This book is a fiction, but it is based upon several seemingly separate and yet possibly linked historical mysteries. Not least of these is the worship of the serpent throughout time. As I have shown in several books on the subject, the serpent was worshipped from the very earliest moments of human civilization, if not from the moment we developed consciousness. The reasons for this are wide and varied. They include the snakes seeming ability to resurrect, for it cyclically slithers into the dark places of the earth (equated with our unconscious self) and comes out again revitalized and leaving behind its shroud or skin. Mirrors to this tale are found in cultures and traditions across the world, not least of which are Christianity, whereby Christ leaves behind his skin/shroud and is resurrected. He himself was equated with the serpent of Moses, another memory of snake worship.

Other reasons for serpent/snake worship include earth energies now known to be electromagnetic energy and to collate or merge at certain points of power upon the earth. In all these places man has discovered the energy and built wonderful structures as if taking the power themselves. One of these places is the Vatican the nest of vipers. Man has also taken himself on inward journeys into states of altered consciousness and this has always been linked to the serpent.

The reason is simple, because when in these states man sees snakes, wave forms or even the double strands of DNA. These journeys would often take place at the power places of the globe.

The snake was raised up as the greatest of symbols for connection to the divine within each of us and it is for this reason that the early true Christians, known as Gnostics, were also known as Ophites or serpent worshippers. It is a supposed heretical system that was wiped from the face of the earth by a jealous Paulician Church, which was later known as the Catholic Church.

This then is a novel, a fiction, a journey of imagination into what is truth. It is a modern quest, a modern method of retelling. I ask the reader to judge for themselves the truths and untruths. Today there are many who take the physical and textual evidence of serpent worship and abuse it with

imaginative fiction and call it fact. These shining serpents of ages past are made to be aliens from distant planets who came to earth and who breed with the proto-humans to create new bloodlines. Their vestiges are called reptiles and our leaders are said to be of serpent descent and who shape-shift when out of the public gaze. The difference between myself and these people, is that when I write a factual book I do not fill in the gaps with such nonsense, but instead I have allowed my imagination to run riot in this novel and have included some elements I have discovered along the way and not yet revealed in factual form. You decide…

The following appendix is a factual historical Timeline to help you decide what is the truth. It moves through time and shows what we know so far about the history of man in relation to the worship of the serpent, Gnosis and thread of oral tradition via alchemists and mystics.

10000 BC (approximately)

Dramatic rises in temperature cause extinction's and climatic turmoil following the previous Ice Age. Plate tectonics added to this cause great floods and Lake Victoria discharges into the Nile. A great flood occurred. This was followed by a dramatic fall in temperature close to Ice Age temperatures.

9,000 BC

Humans have by this period populated the globes habitable places, which is not surprising when we consider that they were being forced to move due to the immense changes in the world's weather. Sparse population allows sufficient game and gathering food for the populations to flourish.

6,000 BC

Cave drawings and sophisticated technologies from Catal Huyuk and Sabi-Abyad.

Earliest evidence of 'village level' civilization at Mehgarh 125

miles west of Indus valley. Evidence of crop farming producing Asiatic wheat. The site also shows domestication of animals and trade with the west, including copper and cotton as far away as Arabia. This notion of international trade is often overlooked by many. The very idea that ancient peoples traded with each other for wealth and products begs the question did these traders also take religion with them?

It simply must be that the ancient priesthood of the shining serpent worshippers were traveling with these trade routes and at present nobody is quite sure just how far the traders reached. Indeed the evidence states that the slightly later Harappan cultures were extremely advanced in comparison to other cultures at the time and were a great sea-faring people. If the worship of the serpent and the shining enlightenment experience (altered state of consciousness) were being spread from anywhere at this time, then it is here.

By 5,000 BC the site changed from semi-permanent structures to mud brick and large housing. This culture is thought to have evolved into the Harappan culture.

5,000 3,000 BC

The Sumerians have by now migrated to Mesopotamia and have taken over the ideas of those already there. The assemblies of the elders are now beginning to give way to kings and the priesthood is separating from the people. Great Flood stories are common in this era, with the Gilgamesh Epic giving rise later on to the Noah myth.

Beginnings of the Indus-Sarasvati civilizations of Harappa (approx. 4,000 BC) and Mohenjo-daro (approx. 2,500 BC) with densely packed villages, extensive irrigation and a wide variety of crops being planted. Covering more than half a million miles of Northern Indian subcontinent, they are

classed as highly artistic and skilled with images of snakes, unicorns and other animals being seen in their art for religious and serpent-worshipping purposes, most images relate entirely to the enlightenment experience. The Swastika, thought to be overlapping snakes in the symbol of eternity is also

seen. Also at this time, earliest signs of Shiva worship (as Pashupati) Shiva being linked with the snake.

Pashupati was the 'horned god' of the Indus civilization of the great Harappan city, which developed from a culture at this time in northern India and Pakistan. At its peak this civilization covered an area twice as large as that of the Egyptian kingdom and four times that of Sumer and Akkad.

There is strong archaeological evidence for the worship of the

'horned god' and the 'world mother' or 'earth goddess' at this time. Pashupati is seen as the prototype for the god Shiva who is linked with serpent worship and horns are indicative of the shining aspect.

In the Skanda Purana Shiva says, 'As I reside here in the forest of Sleshmanta in the form of a beast, My name will hence be known as the Pashupati the world over' indicating a worldwide knowledge of the 'horned god' which is what we indeed find. 'Pashupati' means, 'Lord of the Animals.' There is an undeniable link between Pashupati and Cernunnos, the horned god of the Celts seen on the Gundestrup Cauldron associated with the serpent and in a Lotus position of meditation a route to shining (altered state of consciousness).

As the Gundestrup Cauldron is dated between the 4th and 1st centuries BCE this shows the long-standing belief in this

'Lord of Animals' and his links with the resurrection of the dead in the cauldron. The 'horned god' the 'Shining One' sits in a 'lotus position' associated with Yoga and he holds a ram-headed serpent which reveals this 'serpent god's' familiarity with Kundalini a Hindu version of the 'enlightenment experience.' In the traditions of India, the Kundalini (she who is coiled or serpent power) is symbolized by a serpent. This is the experience of enlightenment through the Chakra points of

the body, upward to the head where the awakening is experienced.

There is evidence at this time of snake worship in the Indus civilization akin to the Naga worship; indeed they were often called Nagas.

4,000 BC

In a balbale to Ninazu 7-15 we find the words: 'May he make the way straight for you as far as the ends of heaven and earth .

. .'

This sounds remarkably similar to the idea that the Baptist would make the way straight for Jesus. There are of course many such similarities; the snake in the Garden of Eden and whole of Genesis are originally Mesopotamian epics which are themselves derived from the shamanic tradition. In the story, Eve resembles the images of the 'Mother Goddess'

whom was depicted with a serpent's head and in some she is suckling a baby very similar to the images of Mary and Isis.

There are also remarkable links in symbolism between Sumeria and the Templars.

OceanofPDF.com

3500 BC

Extensive long barrows and chambered tombs appear across Europe.

3,300 BC

The beginning of the Mayan calendar.

OceanofPDF.com

3200 BC

Earliest evidence of occupation in Peru. Dating from this time there are thirty coastal villages definitely established after this time but before 2500 BC.

3,100 BC

Aryan people inhabit Iran, Iraq and the western Indus-Sarasvati valley, although some experts say the first wave was 2,000 BC. The Aryan culture is described as a culture of spiritual knowledge and they probably inherited the serpent

worship beliefs of the Indus civilization.

This period sees the first known incarnation of Stonehenge in England. From the same period, a Stele of the Serpent King found in Egypt has a bas-relief of a falcon in profile above a nearly abstract stroke of a snake (now in the Louvre, Paris.) The Pyramid texts are from this time.

The forests of Europe regenerate after years of clearing why?

3,050 BC

Long-distance trade with the Indus Valley civilization, China, Mesopotamia and Egypt are apparent.

3,000 BC

In India, the fabled Arjuna (John) is said to have visited Patala (an Atlantis styled underworld) and married the daughter of the Naga king.

There is evidence of serpent worship in China from this period. The Manchurian goddess temple shows fragments from this period of a 'bear-dragon' statue. This seems to be a reference to the Great and Little Bears of the constellations Ursa Major and Ursa Minor divided as they are by the constellation of Draco 'the Dragon' or 'Serpent.' This confirms that the

culture of the serpent along with other beasts was already in place and therefore 'serpent worship' in China MUST be older.

Newgrange in Ireland is built around this time.

This is also a time that the archaeologists tell us is a period for great human migrations across India, Europe, China and elsewhere.

2,700 BC

Old Kingdom period (Egypt)

The worship of Shiva is indicated on seals of the Indus-

Sarasvati The Indus-Sarasvati civilization spreads from Pakistan to Gujurat, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. It is the largest of the world's civilizations with strong links to Mesopotamia, Minoan Crete, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Karnataka.

Hindu beliefs are said to emerge at this time as the mixture of Indian and Aryan culture creates new beliefs. The snake is central to these beliefs. Besides Vishnu, snakes are commonly associated with Shiva (previously Pashupati.) Priests in the modern era still wear the serpent across their chests as the sacred thread Upanayanam, which is a symbol of initiation and second birth, and like Jesus, the night before receiving this 'second birth' is spent in isolation.

Coiled serpents adorn the hair, neck and arms: offerings to snakes are made in holes; milk and blood are offered. Could this also be what the worldwide phenomenon of cup and ring marks were for? As we know, on another level, the cup marks symbolize the vortex of the earth and the chakra vortices within the head or brain. These cup and ring marks are virtually worldwide ranging from 30cm diameter down to 1cm. They are often seen in association with horseshoe shapes as the horse was the shamanic steed taking the shaman into the interior of the earth the underlying energy vortex of our reality known as the Underworld. They are often circular; with concentric rings (rings within rings,) a cup being at the center. These shapes and patterns can be shown to have remarkable astronomical associations, as

well as cyclical and fertility related meanings. The concept that these markings must be for one purpose only is just not tenable.

This was a time of religion, when everything was interrelated.

There was no great difference to the snake that crawled on the floor to the one that was envisaged in the sky. These things had many purposes and in my opinion they may very well have had practical purposes as well such as offering to the sacred serpent, milk and blood, or collecting venom from the snake as a return gift. In Ireland they are known as Bullauns.

These are large basins carved out and pebbles placed inside.

The suppression of the beliefs surrounding these stones was

so deep-rooted within the culture that the Catholic Church simply turned many of them into Baptism Fonts. Folklore evaded this and still today there is the belief that water gathered from the marked hollows can cure ailments. Milky offerings similar to those offered the world over to serpents where offered to the fairies in these cup and ring stones and from Ireland to Scotland a remarkable survival of an ancient practice. The fairies of course, when traced backwards, end up being the sibyls or nymphs the 'snakes' of the ancient snake worship.

The 'Sleep of Brahma' is symbolized by two snakes, one downward, representing divine sleep, (as in one's

'unconscious sleep' in the created forms of Maya) and one upwards, representing divine awakening. Could the Hindu god Brahma have any relation to A-braham? The names are very similar.

2,500 BC

Ebla flourishes (2500-2200 BC)

This is the time of Arbor Low in England and its construction began with a mound said by some to be a serpent. Avebury Serpent in England constructed.

2540 BC is the standard dating for the Great Pyramid at Giza although this is hotly debated.

In the Middle East, Dumuzi, or the 'son of the abyss' emerges as the prototype of the resurrected savior (also called 'the shepherd') the ever-reviving Sumerian god of vegetation and the very first known Green Man.

Dumuzi is known for his horned crown of the moon and is both the son and husband of the goddess Gula-Bau. She is seen sitting in front of the serpent in a relief from 2,500 BC

called 'Goddess of the Tree of Life.' Dumuzi is also Tammuz, the equivalent of Osiris (born from the mouth of the snake.) Osiris is seen as Dionysius in the Greek tongue and Bacchus in Rome, thus proving the ancient link of the serpent with

healing. He was originally the son of Ningishzida, the serpent god of Mesopotamia entwined about an axial rod as a pair of copulating vipers and hence one of the oldest images of the Caduceus. His dual counter part, Gula, the 'earth goddess,' sits below ground where the cosmic serpent begins to rise as the sun. She is the patroness of herbs, healing and life. From the very beginning the serpent deities are involved in the most important aspects of ancient man's life, fertility, creation, healing and immortality. Here is a distinct link over thousands of years to possibly the original Green Man.

OceanofPDF.com

2300 BC

The first known author in the world is the Priestess Enheduanna 2300-2200 BC

Indo-Europeans invade and conquer Greece turning themselves into an aristocracy. These are known as the Mycenae Greeks and overlay the existing gods with their own Indo-European versions in essence they are the same. These Mycenae have contact with and trade with the Minoans, Egyptians and all the surrounding area, spreading and sharing ideas.

A Semite by the name of Sargon the Great takes power in Kish, the Sumerian city. Here, Sargon is conquering in the name of the god Enlil one of the original Shining Ones of Sumerian Epics.

The Bronze Age, according to the Golden Age project, ends at this point with documentary evidence that massive cometary debris explodes in the Mediterranean and India causing global climate change.

2,100 BC

Middle Kingdom (Egypt)

The second stage of Stonehenge now featuring bluestones, which were brought 135 miles from Wales. 90 bluestones are

set up in a horseshoe pattern in the center of the temple.

2,000 BC

Old Babylonian Period

Israel's Patriarchal period

The Vishnu Purana, the oldest of the Hindu Puranas, speaks of Atala, the 'White Island,' which is one of the seven islands (dwipas) belonging to Patala (the home of the Naga serpent deities.) The location of Atala is said

to be on the seventh zone, which according to Colonel Wilford (the translator of the Vishnu Puranas,) is 24 to 28 degrees north latitude or the Canary Islands just off the North African coast though this could easily be the starting point of the fabled Atlantis, rather than its actual center. In the Bhavishna Purana, Samba made a journey to Saka-Dwipa (island) looking for Maga (Magi,) the worshippers of the Sun/Snake. Riding upon Gurada, the Phoenix-like, flying vehicle of Krishna and Vishnu, he eventually arrives amongst the Magas.

World population at this time is 27 million. India is 5 million making it 22% of the world's population.

The standard historical dating for the emergence of Hinduism.

Approximate dating for Stonehenge third phase with familiar topped caps.

Stone construction at Arbor Low in England. Also Carnac in France another ancient 'stone walkway' actually meaning

'Snake' as in the Egyptian Karnac.

Silbury Hill near Avebury in England is said to be constructed at this time. This is the largest prehistoric mound in Europe over 130 feet, built over 3 phases and thought not to be a burial mound, although the purpose is still unknown.

Continual improvement to Stonehenge up until 1,500 BC.

Cylinder Seals from Mesopotamia showing the goddess

Ishtar, the 'Tree of Life' and the 'Serpent' all are common motifs and all related to each other. Many believe that the May Day Dance once common in England and Europe is a direct descendent of these beliefs. The tradition goes that a tree the shamanic 'axis mundi' or 'world tree' which symbolizes both the human spinal column and the earth's axis would be topped with a wreath like the orb at the top of the Caduceus, and women with a red ribbon and men with a white ribbon would circle the tree, unifying the fertility aspect of the half year of Beltane. The ribbons symbolize the Hindu, pingala

and ida serpents which in turn symbolize the opposite nerve channels that supposedly align the spine.

Many of these rituals descend from Floralia, the Roman festivals of flowers, but not the May Day Dance.

The Canaanite goddess Asherah was symbolized by a Tree and worshipped in groves, strangely she was referred to as the

'Lady of the Serpent.' Also, Tanit, the goddess of Carthage in Africa was associated with the 'tree of life' often depicted with serpent wavy lines.

'Tanit' means 'serpent lady' and she was often associated with the Caduceus, as we can see from coins minted at the time. All this links the female aspect of the snake, and the male aspect of the tree to the 'life cycle,' 'fertility' and 'resurrection' beliefs.

Indeed, at Carthage there remained one of the last Serpent/Goddess Temples, which refused to disappear until 422 AD when the Christian Church finally destroyed it. There is little wonder, from the connection between the Tree and the Snake, that many cultures (even today) still venerate the snake as the 'all healer;' the life-giving essence and as a mystical object of adoration. (See 400 AD.) In Italy the May Day celebration in the city of Cucullo actually celebrates a snake event called the Serpari Festival on the first Thursday of May. This festival has been traced back to the Snake Goddess Angitia, worshipped by the Marsi, a tribe who lived in Italy from the 9th to 1st century BC. Angitia was well known for its healing skills and was replaced by the Catholic St Domenico Abate. The image of the Saint is paraded through the town wreathed in snakes.

1800 1700 BC

Approximate dates for Abraham and Sarah according to standard history. Also Isaac and Ishmael.

1,600 BC

Kassite period in Babylonia (1600 1150 BC) The standard historical dating for the emergence of Judaism.

The Book of the Dead (Egyptian).

The period of the Minoan Snake Goddess.

OceanofPDF.com

1300 1200 BC

Mosaic (Israel) period Moses founds Judaism Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV) rules in 1350 AD and tries to stamp the rule of the one god, Aten, onto his people.

Approximate period that Zarathushtra (Zoroaster) founds Zoroastrianism called the religion of the Magi, although many believe it to be 10000 years old.

Also the mythical date of Hermes Trismegistus. Note that Zoroaster, the leader of the Magi and Moses the emergent serpent are from the same area and period and that the occult Thrice Great Hermes is also thought to be from this time frame.

OceanofPDF.com

1250 1200 BC

Exodus from Egypt of the Israelites, even though Canaan (land of serpents) was part of the Egyptian empire.

OceanofPDF.com

1200 BC

Sea peoples invade Egypt and Syro-Palestine **1200 1050 BC**

Judges period (Israel)

OceanofPDF.com

950 BC

The Torah written.

OceanofPDF.com

920 BC

According to William Harwood in *Mythology's Last Gods:*

Yahweh and Jesus, this is the time that the myths of Adam and Eve were laid down as the Genesis story we know today. Note that this is many years after the original serpent stories and so many changes to the origin have been made.

OceanofPDF.com

800 BC

Homers Iliad and Odyssey written.

Upanishad's written.

OceanofPDF.com

700 BC

The Tower of Babylon to the God Bel (Baal - solar god) is said to have been built around this time. According to many sources built on a spiral pattern (snake/serpents on the spinal column) upward towards the godhead and the enlightenment aspect thus the Tower of Babylon is a building to the shining ones. Bel may very well come from Ob-El or serpent god and in the Greek he is said to be Beliar (Bel Aur the 'solar deity.') This is therefore highly likely to be the dragon of Babylon that is so spoken of in the Bible. It was indeed the opinion of John Bathurst Deane in *Worship of the Serpent Traced Throughout the World*, that 'live serpents were kept at Babylon as objects of adoration; or at least, of veneration, as oracular or talismanic.' As these practices were common in Egypt and Greece at this time (and prior) then there is little wonder that the practice should also be found in Babylon. This Bel or Baal is the subject of a tablet in the British Museum, which shows Baal being beaten, crucified and resurrected in fact the whole passion play is the same as Christ's.

OceanofPDF.com

600 BC

Zoroaster born 628 527 BC

Mahavira (Jainism) 599 527 BC

Buddha born 563 483 BC

Lao Tse 580 500 BC

Confucius Approx 551/579 BC

Tao te Ching (Taoist) written. (520 BC)

OceanofPDF.com

164 150 BC

Book of Daniel written.

Dead Sea Scrolls early versions written.

OceanofPDF.com

4 BC

The supposed date of the birth of Jesus.

This is also the date of birth of one Apollonius of Tyana possibly the 'true Christ' who went to India to learn from the Naga King Serpents and was taught in the Temple of Aesculapius the serpent god of healing.

OceanofPDF.com

50 AD

The Gospel of Thomas written now a Gnostic Gospel, but notably written earlier than all the Orthodox Gospels.

OceanofPDF.com

100 AD

Coptic texts, translated from Greek from around this time were discovered at Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt towards the end of the Second World War. These included fragments of The Gospels of Thomas and the Gospels of Philip and Mary. They make it plain that the Virgin Birth and Resurrection were very much symbolic. They also point out that the Serpent from the Garden of Eden was wise in giving the fruit of knowledge to Adam and Eve (*The Secret Scroll*, Andrew Sinclair.)

Shinto religion begins.

Christianity born through proselytizing.

The Hermetica is thought to have been composed at this time.

OceanofPDF.com

200 AD

Plotinus the Neoplatonic philosopher and mystic is born approx 204 AD.

Iamblicus, the Neoplatonic philosopher born approximately 250 AD.

OceanofPDF.com

313 AD

Edict of Milan declares official toleration for Christianity.

OceanofPDF.com

325 AD

The Council of Nicaea declare the Son equal to the Father.

391 AD

Christianity declared the official state religion of Rome.

OceanofPDF.com

400 AD

The Emperor Theodosius bans many pagan rituals, including tying ribbons (symbolic of the serpent) to trees. This was the same Emperor who had his sight restored by a grateful serpent that laid a precious stone upon his eyes.

500/600 AD

The time of Arthur. Albert Pike the Masonic historian says that the lost word of Masonry is concealed in the name of Arthur. His name is Pendragon, which means, 'head dragon.'

The Sefer Yetzirah is edited together at this point.

Muhammad 570 636 AD

OceanofPDF.com

700 1000 AD

Khalid Ibn Yazeed born, famous Islamic alchemist.

Jabir Ibn Haiyan (Geber or Jebir where we get our word gibberish from), Muslim alchemist.

Ibn Ishaq Al-Kindi philosopher and physician.

Albategnius Astronomer and mathematician.

A-Pharabius philosopher on logic.

Al-Tamimi Muhammad Ibn Amyal alchemist.

Al-Nirizi astronomer.

Ahmed Al-Tabari physician.

Al Majrett'ti Abu-alQasim alchemist.

Ibn Wahshiyh, Abu Baker alchemist.

900-1000 AD

Mackey's Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry tells us that the Druzes settled in Lebanon around this time.

OceanofPDF.com

1000 1150 AD

Sword of Moses composed.

Rome splits from Orthodoxy and forms the Catholic Church 1054 AD.

The First Crusade begins in 1095 and Godfrey de Bouillon becomes the first Christian King of Jerusalem.

Ibn Tufayl Al-Qaysi philosopher and physician.

Ibn Rushd philosopher and physician.

The first Western alchemical treatise comes about in 1144 AD

- note that this is after the first crusade and also note how many Islamic and Arabian alchemists, physicians, philosophers and astronomers there were prior to this, showing a spread of ideas from the Middle East, the home of the ancient Shining Ones. The treatise is called De Compositione Alchemiae and was by Robert of Chester.

Hildegard of Bingen starts writing on science in 1148 AD.

1118/1128 AD

The Knights Templar excavate the ruins of Herod's Temple and return much of what they find to Europe much of it thought to have fallen into the hands of the Sinclair's who go on to build the chapel at Rosslyn. What was this treasure?

Surely it was a mystical treasure. Much of this is fanciful re-writing as I have shown in *Gnosis: The Secret of Solomon's Temple Revealed.*

1144/1155 AD

The second crusade is a disaster for the Christians and by 1187 Saladin the Great has done away with many of those rd

remaining. The 3 crusade was little more than a matter of saving face and propaganda for Richard the Lionheart who th

th

actually got on quite well with Saladin. The 4 and 5

crusades end in utter disaster.

OceanofPDF.com

1118 AD

The founding of the Knights Templar.

OceanofPDF.com

1129 AD

The Templars and crusaders allied with the Assassins to attempt to take Damascus.

1140 AD

Secretum Secretorum a psuedo-Aristotlean translation of Kitab Sirr al-Asrar, a book of 'advice to Kings,' translated into Latin by Hispalensis and Philip of Tripoli in 1243. Thought to be the first showing of the Emerald Tablet of Hermes.

1150/1200 AD

At this time a branch of the Templars build round churches in Bornholm and Cathedral building begins in earnest following buildings techniques discovered during the crusades.

The Turba Philosophorum is translated from Arabic.

In the 12th century the Sword Knights, a branch of the Knights Templar, was established by the Cistercian friar, Theoderik in Riga. These 'Sword Knights' were later to become the Teutonic Knights in Germany. The round churches of Osterlars, Nyker, Olsker and Nylars were said to have been built defensively although there is some debate as to 'against what,' as the buildings were certainly not built to aid very many people in that case. According to Erling Haagensen in Bornholms Mysterier, all these sites were built upon the familiar Templar sacred geometry.

OceanofPDF.com

1180 AD

The first Grail Romance is written by Chretien de Troyes.

OceanofPDF.com

1190 AD

King Arthur's grave is supposedly discovered at Glastonbury.

OceanofPDF.com

1200 AD approx

Period of Roger Bacon, Michael Scot, Ramon Lull, Abraham Abulafia, Joseph Gikatilla, Honorius of Thebes, Peter de Abano, John Duns Scotus, and the rise of the Knights Templar with the aid of the Cistercians.

Sefer Ha-Zohar written by Moses de Leon and attributed to Simon ben Yohai.

The Holy Vehm of Westphalia are created around the middle th

of the 13 century.

1209 AD

The Albigensian (Cathar = pure) Crusade is fought against what the Catholics call heresy which is claimed to be based upon the teachings of Manes.

OceanofPDF.com

1231 AD

The first mention of Alchemy in French literature the Roman de la Rose.

OceanofPDF.com

1235 AD

The Bishop of Lincoln, Robert Grosseteste, discusses the transmutation of metals in his De Artibus Liberalibus and De Generatione Stellarum.

OceanofPDF.com

1240 AD

Thomas of Cantimpre, the Dominican, actually mentions alchemy in his Liber de Natura Rerum.

OceanofPDF.com

1256 AD

King Alfonso the Wise of Castille orders the translation of alchemical texts from Arabic and writes (supposedly) a treatise on the Philosophers Stone. The following year a Fransiscan Friar by the name of Bonadventura d'Iseo writes Liber Compostella, which includes alchemical recipes.

OceanofPDF.com

1264 AD

Albertus Magnus writes *De Mineralibus*.

OceanofPDF.com

1270 AD

Thomas Aquinas is actually sympathetic to the ideas of alchemical transmutation in his *Summa Theologica*. But then in 1272 AD the Provincial Chapter at Narbonne forbids the Franciscans to practice alchemy implying that they had been doing so. In 1273 the Dominican Order at Pest warns friars not to study or teach it.

OceanofPDF.com

1271 AD

Acre is lost and with it the final reason for the existence of the Templars who were to guard the way to the Holy Land. The

other orders retire to their European of Mediterranean homes such as Rhodes where continuing battles ensue right into the th

16 century on Malta and elsewhere. The Templars and others (Knights of Malta now) actually become the legendary pirates of the sea and the skull and cross bones are their th

st

emblems at sea. Later in 20 and 21 century America there will be a Skull and Crossbones Society joined by almost every single successful presidential candidate.

OceanofPDF.com

1300 AD

Arnold of Villanova writes some alchemical treatises. In 1310

Dante begins his *Divine Comedy*.

1 3 0 7 A D

Phillipe IV of France begins his crusade against the Templars and arrests begin.

OceanofPDF.com

1314 AD

Robert the Bruce is already under Papal Excommunication and therefore has no problem in receiving Templars into his lands to help with the fight against the English. There is some evidence to suggest that the tide at the Battle of Bannockburn was turned by the assistance of the remnant of the Templars.

Amazingly this occurred on St. John's Day, the day special to the Knights Templar and the opposite day of the year to Christmas Day.

OceanofPDF.com

1315 AD

Jacques de Molay the last Grand Master of the Knights Templar is burned at the stake in Paris.

Raymond Lull, Peter de Abano, Joseph Gikatilla all die.

OceanofPDF.com

1317 AD

Pope John XXII issues a Papal Bull against alchemical counterfeit and the Cistercians ban alchemy albeit late in the day and in 1318 actually make an example of their monk, Adolf Meutha for practicing alchemy. In 1323 the Dominicans begin burning alchemical texts and ban it's teaching at the university of Paris.

1329 AD

King Edward II actually asks Thomas Cary to find him two alchemists who are prepared to give up the secret of their art.

Following this, and all that has been said about bans on alchemy the Pope actually gives funds to his physician to set a laboratory for 'certain secret work.' Ten years later Pope Benedict XII orders an investigation into alchemical activity of certain clerics and monks thus highlighting that the church is far from keeping the thing 'underground.'

OceanofPDF.com

1374 AD

Wild revelry is reported in the lower Rhine as the traditional (and Pagan) St. John's Day festivals bring on dancing, visions and prophesy. In Italy the same thing occurs involving the bite of the Tarantula spider and giving rise to the Italian term tarantella. This is anthropological evidence for the revelry experienced whilst the crowds are whipped up to excitement bringing on illuminative aspects of the enlightenment experience. Similar experiences are reported across Europe in Nunneries and Monasteries, as well as elsewhere, as the religious excitement is instilled in the people. By 1400 these experiences had passed through Holland, Germany, Italy, France and several other European countries.

OceanofPDF.com

1388 AD

Chaucer hides alchemical texts in his *Canterbury Tales*.

OceanofPDF.com

1390 AD

The first documentation of a Masonic Fraternity is found in the *Regius Poem*.

OceanofPDF.com

1433 AD

Under the patronage of the de'Medicis Marsilio Ficino translates many Greek classics including the *Corpus Hermetica*. Texts that have been hidden from hundreds of years are let lose on the world of initiates.

OceanofPDF.com

1440 AD

Introduction of the Tarot Card as we know it, and the age of

printing begins.

Construction of Rosslyn Chapel begun by Sir William rd

Sinclair of Orkney. The ground plan of which matches the 3

Temple in Jerusalem perfectly. William's father was a close friend of the Bruce and there are Templar links with the Sinclair's throughout their history. Dr Robert Lomas believes that the building of Rosslyn is indicative of the Freemasons and uses it to prove that Freemasonry is of a much more ancient heritage than previously believed. For instance Lomas has uncovered a text of 1483, from the burgh of Aberdeen stating 'masownys of the lurge' or Masons of the Lodge.

OceanofPDF.com

1453 AD

Constantinople falls to the Turks and Greek manuscripts are spread across the world.

OceanofPDF.com

1460 1500 AD

James II of Scotland dies and his son James III strips William Sinclair of his estates due to an apparent threat to the crown of Scotland.

Johannes Reuchlin who wrote on the Kabbalah is born.

Johannes Trithemius the scholar and Benedictine abbot with interests in the occult is born.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the Italian philosopher and alchemist is born.

Francesco Giorgio otherwise known as Zorzi is born and writes *De Harmonia Mundi.*

Ficino translates the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

Martin Luther is born.

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa who published *Malleus Maleficarum* is born.

Aurelus Philippus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim or more easily remember are Paracelsus the philosopher and alchemist is born and taught by Trithemius.

Twelve men petition Henry VI of England for a license to practice alchemy.

1500 1600 AD

The Reformation begins.

The Anabaptist Theomaniacs seize Munster rule is by means of ecstatic prophecy.

The Alumbrados or Illuminated Ones of Spain (founded from within the Franciscan Order) and the Roshaniya or Illuminated Ones of the Arabian

mountains are founded and flourish during this time just prior to the Illuminati of the Bavarian Weishaupt. The central theme of these cults is self illumination or enlightenment and is linked with the Sufi.

Sikhism with Guru Nanak 1469 1538 AD

Guillaume Postel, the French mathematician and philosopher is born

Johan Weyer born.

John Dee born.

Maximillian II born.

Isaac Luria, Jewish kabbalist born.

Giambattista della Porta the author of *Magia Naturalis* is born.

Reginald Scot, author of *Discoverie of Withcraft* is born.

Faust born.

Giordan Bruno, the Italian philosopher born. Fated to be burned at the stake.

Simon Forman born.

Edward Kelly, friend of John Dee, born.

Heinrich Khunrath born.

Michael Maier, alchemist, philosopher and physician born.

Robert Fludd, mystic, born.

Jakob Boehme, mystic, born.

The Zohar is printed.

The Inquisition established.

First Modern Lodges of Freemasonry founded in Scotland with the earliest surviving Lodge Minutes from Edinburgh of 1599 AD.

OceanofPDF.com

1600 1700 AD

James VI is made a Mason at the Lodge of Scoon and Perth.

He then instructs William Schaw to set up the modern lodge system in Scotland, which affirm William Sinclair as

hereditary Grand Master Mason of Scotland. James VI takes Freemasonry to England when he becomes James I of Great Britain in 1602 AD.

Emergence of the Quakers (Religious Society of Friends) in 1648, who experienced ecstatic states hence quaking and who called themselves the 'Children of Light.' They were given over to violent shaking, trance states, glossolalia and visions in much the same manner as the early shaman thus showing the religious tendency towards the illumination process. They believed that everybody has an Inner Light for their own guidance this included those of other religions such as Muslims, and that each faith had their own way of speaking about the process. The Quaker process involved much the same methods used by Buddhists, which involved being peaceful and attuning themselves to the Inner Light.

Athanasius Kircher born.

William Lilly, born and translates *Trithemius*.

Elias Ashmole born.

Robert Turner born.

Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, mystic, born.

Thomas Vaughan born.

Emanuel Swedenborg, mystic, born. Swedenborg's influence brought many ancient concepts to light including transcendentalism, spiritualism, faith healing, mesmerism (re-discovered by Franz Anton Mesmer at this time) and perfectionism. He called his church the New Jerusalem in attempt to

return to the spiritualism of the times of the Temple and that it was time to inaugurate a New Age. It was said that the followers of Swedenborg experienced a 'supernatural flash of light and other manifestations of the inner light.'

(Webb, James, *The Occult Underground*, Open Court Press, 1976.) This can only be the Shining experience that has lent its name to so many over such a long time, and it is interesting to note that Swedenborg noted also the magnetic *effects of this experience.*

Rosicrucian Manifesto published.

Time of the Salem Witchcraft Trials

1700-1800 AD

Lodges in England begin to disclaim their Scottish Heritage when the Jacobite rebellions begin. The Grand Lodge of London is formed and in 1733 the first American Lodge is founded. There are developments and alterations to the surface of Freemasonry throughout this century with Accepted, Operative and a whole host of other excuses for boys clubs. In 1776 the Mason Benjamin Franklin signs the Declaration of Independence from Great Britain a war of Independence created and manipulated by Freemasons.

In 1754 there was a meeting of Jesuits and Masons at the Jesuit college in Clermont. It is believed that this was to work out a strategy to overthrow the English Crown and return Catholicism to Great Britain and then its Empire. Although this failed the Jesuits had already infiltrated the Freemasons who were already at the top of English power, including the Royalty and Parliament.

The Hugenots had fled to Cevennes following the persecution of Louis XIV and much like the followers of Swedenborg also experience ecstatic states creating an epidemic of experiences according to the church, leading to the term 'tremblers of Cevennes.' This 'epidemic' spread even to Monastic orders in the Roman Catholic Church and to Protestant countries where they were attributed to the Holy Spirit.

John Wesley and the new Protestants also reveal that there are peculiar experiences of the Spirit occurring, with people falling down and convulsing in the Spirit, saying that it was

'as if they were struck by lightning.' This lead to a sect of the Methodists being terms 'Jumpers.'

In essence what is occurring is the religious fervor is being created by evangelical preachers, raising the 'spirits' of the people to such a high state of arousal that their neurons are firing on all cylinders, releasing various hormones and inducing hypnotic and almost drug induced states. This is no

different to the ecstatic states seen in the early Shaman and can be seen still in present day Shaman. These states of arousal spread across the Christian world, giving rise to the Great Awakening or Kentucky Revival in the USA and the term jerk.

OceanofPDF.com

1860 AD

British Army Engineers excavate beneath the Temple Mount and find Templar artifacts and tunnels.

OceanofPDF.com

1884 AD

The Statue of Liberty (designed by Masons Eiffel and Barthold) is erected in New York with a Masonic ritual of the laying of the cornerstone.

OceanofPDF.com

1896 AD

A census shows over 25,000 Naga forms in the North West province of India with 123,000 votaries of the snake god Guga and 35,000 votaries of snake gods in the Punjab. (*The Popular Religion and Folk-lore of Northern India* by W.

Crooke, 1896.)

1933 - AD

nd

Roosevelt is a 32 Degree Mason and encourages the creation of the State of Israel reclaiming the Temple. He signs of the US debt to the world bank including the Rothschild's and Rockerfeller's (Masons).

rd

Truman (33 degree Mason) is his vice-president and becomes actual president 1945 and in 1948 recognizes the State of Israel.

It is claimed that the Rothschild's companies back Hitler and Stalin in WWII, who then go on after the war to set up the United Nations. Rockerfeller goes on to set up the Trilateral Commission.

OceanofPDF.com

Today

The worship of the serpent is still being crushed as the Church denounce *The Serpent Grail* book because it reveals once

again how serpents were worshipped around the world in ancient times.

OceanofPDF.com

Recommended Reading

Below is a list of books that I have often referred to in writing my own and which I recommend for the serious investigator of our sacred heritage.

Ableson, J., *Jewish Mysticism*, London, G Bell and Sons Ltd.

Anon, *The Trail of the Serpent*, publisher, date and author not stated

Ashe, Geoffrey. *The Quest for Arthur's Britain*, London, Paladin, 1971

Baigent. *Ancient Traces*, London, Viking, 1998.

Balfour, Mark. *The Sign of the Serpent*, London, Prism, 1990.

Balfour, Michael. *Megalithic Mysteries*, London, Parkgate Books, 1992.

Barber, Malcolm. *The Trial of the Templars*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978.

Barrett, David. *Sects, Cults and Alternative Religions*, London, Blandford, 1996.

Basham, A.L. *The Wonder that was India*, Fontana Collins, 1954.

Bayley, H. *The Lost Language of Symbolism*, London, Bracken Books, 1996.

Beatty, Longfield. *The Garden of the Golden Flower*, London, Senate, 1996.

Begg, E. *The Cult of the Black Virgin*, London, Arkana, 1985.

Blavatsky, H.P. *Theosophical Glossary*, Whitefish, M.T., R.

A. Kessinger Publishing Ltd, 1918

Borchant, Bruno. *Mysticism*, Maine, Weisner, 1994.

Bouquet A.C. *Comparative Religion*, London, Pelican, 1942

Boyle, Veolita Parke. *The Fundamental Principles of Yi-King, Tao: The Cabbalas of Egypt and the Hebrews*, London, W & G Foyle, 1934.

Broadhurst, Paul, and Hamish Miller. *The Dance of the Dragon*, Cornwall, Mythos, 2000.

Bryant, N. *The High Book of the Grail*, Cambridge, D S

Brewer, 1985.

Bryden, R. *Rosslyn a History of the Guilds, the Masons and the Rosy Cross*, Rosslyn, Rosslyn Chapel Trust, 1994.

Campbell, Joseph. *Transformations of Myth Through Time*, London, Harper and Row, 1990

Cantor, N.F. *The Sacred Chain*, London, Harper Collins, 1994.

Carr-Gomm, Sarah. *Dictionary of Symbols in Art*, London, Duncan Baird Publishers, 1995.

Carpenter, Edward. *Pagan and Christian Creeds: Their Origin and Meaning*, London, Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1920.

Churchward, Albert. *The Origin and Evolution of Religion*.

Whitefish, M.T., Kessinger Publishing, 1997

Churton, Tobias. *The Golden Builders*, Lichfield, Signal Publishing, 2002.

Clarke, Hyde and C. Staniland Wake. *Serpent and Siva Worship*, Whitefiesh, M.T., R. A. Kessinger Publishing Ltd, 1877.

Cumont, F. *The Mysteries of Mithra*, Dover, Dover Publications. 1956

Currer-Briggs, N. *The Shroud and the Grail; a modern quest for the true grail*, New York, St Martins Press. 1987

David-Neel, Alexandria. *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, Dover, Dover Publications. 1929

De Martino, Ernesto. *Primitive Magic*, Dorset, Prism Unity, 1972.

Devereux, Paul. *Secrets of Ancient and Sacred Places: The World's Mysterious Heritage*, Beckhampton, Beckhampton Press, 1995.

Shamanism and the Mystery Lines, London, Quantum, 1992.

Symbolic Landscapes, Glastonbury, Gothic Image, 1992.

Davies, Rev. Edward. *The Mythology and Rites of the British Druids*, London, J. Booth, 1806.

Devereux, Paul. *Places of Power: measuring the secret energy of ancient sites*, London, Blandford. 1999

Eliade, Mircea. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press. 1964

Ellis, Ralph. *Jesus, Last of the Pharaohs*, Cheshire, Edfu Books, 2001

Epstein, Perle. *Kabbalah: The Way of the Jewish Mystic*, Boston, Shambhala Classics, 2001

Evans, Lorraine. *Kingdom of the Ark*, London, Simon and Schuster, 2000.

Feather, Robert. *The Copper Scroll Decoded*, London, Thorsons, 1999.

Ferguson, Diana. *Tales of the Plumed Serpent*, London, Collins and Brown, 2000.

Fontana, David. *The Secret Language of Symbols*, London, Piatkus, 1997.

Fortune, Dion. *The Mystical Qabalah*, Maine, Weiser Books, 2000

Frazer, Sir James. *The Golden Bough*, London, Wordsworth, 1993.

Freke, Timothy, and Peter Gandy. *Jesus and the Goddess*, London, Thorsons, 2001.

Gilbert, Adrian. *Magi*, London, Bloomsbury, 1996.

Graves, Robert. *The Greek Myths: 2,* London, Pelican, 1964.

Hagger, Nicholas. *The Fire and the Stones*, London, Element, 1991.

Hanauer, J.E. *The Holy Land*, London, Senate, 1996.

Halifax, Joan. *Shaman: the Wounded Healer*, London, Crossroad, Thames and Hudson. 1982

Harbison, Peter. *Pre-Christian Ireland*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1988.

Hedsel, Mark. *The Zelator*, London, Century, 1998.

James, E.O. *The Ancient Gods*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962.

Jennings, Hargrave. *Ophiolatreia.* Whitefish, M.T.n Kessinger Publishing. Year unknown.

Johnson, Buffie. *Lady of the Beast: the Goddess and Her Sacred Animals*, San Fransisco, Harper and Row, 1988

Kauffeld, Carl. *Snakes: The Keeper and the Kept*, London, Doubleday and Co., 1969

Kendrick, T. D. *The Druids*, London, Methuen and Co., 1927.

Lapatin, Kenneth. *Mysteries of the Snake Goddess*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002.

Larson, Martin A. *The Story of Christian Origins*, Village, 1977.

Leakey, Richard and Roger Lewin. *Origins Reconsidered,* London, Doubleday, 1992

Lemesurier, Peter. *The Great Pyramid Decoded*, London, Element, 1977.

Leone, Al. *The Totality of God and the Izunome Cross Unlocking the Secret Riddle of the Ages*, unpublished at time o f w r i t i n g t h i s b u t c a n b e r e a d i n f u l l a t www.gizapyramid.com/Leone1.htm

Levi, Eliphas. *Transcendental Magic*, London, Tiger Books, 1995.

Lyall, Neil and Robert Chapman. *The Secret of Staying Young,* London, Pan, 1976.

Mack, B.L. *The Lost Gospel*, London, Element, 1993.

Magin, U. *The Christianisation of Pagan Landscapes*, in The Ley Hunter No. 116, 1992.

Mann, A.T. *Sacred Architecture*, London, Element. 1993

Michell, John, and Christine Rhone. *Twelve-Tribes and the Science of Enchanting the Landscape*, Grand Rapids, Phanes PR. 1991

Nilsson, M. P. *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and Its Survival in Greek Religion,* Oxford, Lund, 1950.

Oliver, George. *Signs and Symbols*, New York, Macoy Publishing. 1906

Oliver, Rev. George. *The History of Initiation*, Whitefish, M.T., R. A. Kessinger Publishing Co, 1841

Orofino, Giacomella. *Sacred Tibetan Teachings on Death and Liberation*, London, Prism-Unity, 1990.

Pagels, E. *The Gnostic Gospels*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson. 1979

Pennick, N. *Sacred Geometry,* Chievely, Capall Bann, 1994

Piggot, Stuart. *The Druids*, London, Thames and Hudson.

1927

Rees, Alwyn, and Brynley. *Celtic Heritage*, London, Thames and Hudson. 1961

Reid, Howard. *Arthur - The Dragon King*, London, Headline, 2001.

Rinbochay, Lati, Rinbochay, Locho, Zahler, Leah, Hopkins, Jeffrey , *Meditative States in Tibetan Buddhism*, London, Wisdom Publications, 1983.

Rohl, David. *A Test of Time: The Bible from Myth to History*, London, Arrow, 1995.

Roberts, Alison. *Hathor Rising: The Serpent Power of Ancient Egypt*, Rottingdean, East Sussex, Northgate, 1995.

Roberts, J.M. *The Mythology of the Secret Societies*, London, Granada. 1972

Roberts, J.M. *Antiquity Unveiled*, Health Research, 1970

Robertson, J. M. *Pagan Christs*, London, Watts, 1903.

Rolleston, T. W. *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race*, London, Mystic P, 1986.

S, Acharya. *The Christ Conspiracy: the greatest story ever sold*, Stelle, Illinois, AVP, 2003.

Schaya, Leo. *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, New Jersey, University Books, 1987.

Schele, Linda, and Mary Ellen Miller. *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art*, George New York, Braziller, 1992.

Scholem, Gershom G. *On the Kabbalah and It's Symbolism*, London, Routledge & Kegan, 1965.

Schonfield, Hugh. *Essene Odyssey,* London, Element, 1984.

The Passover Plot, London, Hutchinson, 1965.

Scott, Ernest. *The People of the Secret,* London, The Octagon Press, 1983.

Seife, Charles. *Zero: The Biography of a Dangerous Idea,* London, Souvenir Press, 2000

Simpson, Jacqueline. *British Dragons,* London, B. T.

Batsford and Co, 1980.

Sharper Knowlson, T. *The Origins of Popular Superstitions and Customs,* London, Senate, 1994.

Thiering, Barbara, *Jesus The Man,* London, Doubleday, 1992.

Jesus of the Apocalypse, London, Doubleday, 1996.

Thomson, Oliver. *Easily Led: A history of Propaganda,* Gloucestershire, Sutton Publishing, 1999.

Tull, George F. *Traces of the Templars,* London, The Kings England Press, 2000

Villars, de, Abbe N. de Montfaucon. *Comte de Gabalis: discourses on the Secret Sciences and Mysteries in accordance with the principles of the Ancient Magi and the*

th

Wisdom of the Kabalistic Philosophers, 17 century.

Whitefiesh, M.T., Kessinger Publishing. 1996

Villanueva, J. L. *Phoenician Ireland*, Dublin, 1833 publisher unknown

Waite, Arthur Edward. *The Hidden Church of the Holy Grail*, Amsterdam, Fredonia Books, 2002.

Wake, C. Staniland. *The Origin of Serpent Worship*, Whitefish, M.T., R. A. Kessinger Publishing Ltd, 1877.

Walker, B. *Gnosticism*, Wellingborough, Aquarian Press.

1983

Wallace-Murphy, Hopkins. *Rosslyn*, London, Element, 2000.

Weisse, John. *The Obelisk and Freemasonry*, Whitefish, M.T.,

R. A. Kessinger Publishing Ltd. 1996

Wheless, Joseph. *Forgery in Christianity*, Health Research, 1990 ??

Williamson, A. *Living in the Sky*, Norman, O.K., University of Oklahoma Press, 1984

Wise, Michael. Abegg, Martin, Cook, Edward, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, London, Harper Collins, 1999.

Within, Enquire. *Trail of the Serpent*, Publisher, author (supposedly Enquire Within) and date kept a secret.

www.gardinersworld.com

OceanofPDF.com

Document Outline

- Page 1
- Page 2
- Page 3
- Page 4
- Page 5
- Page 6
- Page 7
- Page 8
- Page 9
- Page 10
- Page 11
- Page 12
- Page 13
- Page 14
- Page 15
- Page 16
- Page 17
- Page 18
- Page 19
- Page 20
- Page 21
- Page 22
- Page 23
- Page 24
- Page 25
- Page 26
- Page 27
- Page 28
- Page 29
- Page 30
- Page 31
- Page 32
- Page 33

- Page 34
- Page 35
- Page 36
- Page 37
- Page 38
- Page 39
- Page 40
- Page 41
- Page 42
- Page 43
- Page 44
- Page 45
- Page 46
- Page 47
- Page 48
- Page 49
- Page 50
- Page 51
- Page 52
- Page 53
- Page 54
- Page 55
- Page 56
- Page 57
- Page 58
- Page 59
- Page 60
- Page 61
- Page 62
- Page 63
- Page 64
- Page 65
- Page 66
- Page 67
- Page 68
- Page 69
- Page 70

- Page 71
- Page 72
- Page 73
- Page 74
- Page 75
- Page 76
- Page 77
- Page 78
- Page 79
- Page 80
- Page 81
- Page 82
- Page 83
- Page 84
- Page 85
- Page 86
- Page 87
- Page 88
- Page 89
- Page 90
- Page 91
- Page 92
- Page 93
- Page 94
- Page 95
- Page 96
- Page 97
- Page 98
- Page 99
- Page 100
- Page 101
- Page 102
- Page 103
- Page 104
- Page 105
- Page 106
- Page 107

- Page 108
- Page 109
- Page 110
- Page 111
- Page 112
- Page 113
- Page 114
- Page 115
- Page 116
- Page 117
- Page 118
- Page 119
- Page 120
- Page 121
- Page 122
- Page 123
- Page 124
- Page 125
- Page 126
- Page 127
- Page 128
- Page 129
- Page 130
- Page 131
- Page 132
- Page 133
- Page 134
- Page 135
- Page 136
- Page 137
- Page 138
- Page 139
- Page 140
- Page 141
- Page 142
- Page 143
- Page 144

- Page 145
- Page 146
- Page 147
- Page 148
- Page 149
- Page 150
- Page 151
- Page 152
- Page 153
- Page 154
- Page 155
- Page 156
- Page 157
- Page 158
- Page 159
- Page 160
- Page 161
- Page 162
- Page 163
- Page 164
- Page 165
- Page 166
- Page 167
- Page 168
- Page 169
- Page 170
- Page 171
- Page 172
- Page 173
- Page 174
- Page 175
- Page 176
- Page 177
- Page 178
- Page 179
- Page 180
- Page 181

- Page 182
- Page 183
- Page 184
- Page 185
- Page 186
- Page 187
- Page 188
- Page 189
- Page 190
- Page 191
- Page 192
- Page 193
- Page 194
- Page 195
- Page 196
- Page 197
- Page 198
- Page 199
- Page 200
- Page 201
- Page 202
- Page 203
- Page 204
- Page 205

OceanofPDF.com